Museums after Bilbao: Neoliberal Public Space at the Denver Art Museum

by

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Acknowledgments

Mom and Dad: Thank you teaching me to look closely at old buildings and art museums.

Boat House: Keep floating.

Emily: Thank you for sharing Shania and Sheryl with me.

Professor Siry: Thank you for teaching me questions to ask of architecture. And, for your careful guidance, this project and all it has entailed would not have been possible without you.
To witness the plight of those without homes, those who live in public, is to see that this society has fissured and split….Neoliberalism’s abandonment of the common good is also an abandonment of public and civic space. The majority of us withdrew into private space and the minority were left out in public…Outside has, thus, been lost to the rest of us in some way. We have withdrawn into the private sphere. When we did so the public sphere withered away, or became a wilderness. Some were left behind. In this wilderness that is not home.

Rebecca Solnit

Feeling my foot I hear music. Bridging the city.
It’s not the poor, it’s not the rich, it’s us.
And improved public transportation. And cable TV.

Eileen Myles
Introduction

This thesis considers the relationship between municipal urban planning and art museum building with regards to public space surrounding art museums. The first chapter examines the Guggenheim Bilbao (1991-1997) designed by Frank Gehry in the context of that city’s urban planning, as it is the most famous example of a museum as a force of urban redevelopment in the 21st century. The next three chapters focus on municipal urban planning in Denver, Colorado, and Daniel Libeskind’s addition to the Denver Art Museum (1999-2006), the Hamilton Addition, as a museum building that was physically and conceptually modeled after the Guggenheim Bilbao (Figure 1, 2). My thesis provides a reading of how these museums’ architecture, and their associated public spaces were shaped and influenced by municipal urban planning, rather than the just hand of a singular famous architect. Because art museums are generally considered for their architectural style, this thesis provides a new approach by examining art museums and their relationship to urban context via a reading of their public spaces. In this way, I also consider the implicit public associated with the museum and its attendant public space.

This introduction will give readers an orientation to salient theoretical and historiographic issues that provide the basis for my analysis of urban planning, architecture and public space. First, I introduce Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) as a methodology for this thesis’ analysis of buildings and urban spaces as products of larger structural forces. Updating Lefebvre’s Marxist-derived conclusion that space is produced by the forces of capitalism, I suggest space in a contemporary context, especially public space, is produced by neoliberalism. To come to a
theoretical understanding of public space, I draw from Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, an idealized location of social discourse, from his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). Theorists influenced by Habermas often consider public space the spatial embodiment of the public sphere, or the geographical location in which the public sphere emerges. Drawing from Lefebvre’s contention that space is produced and that public space is a location of the public sphere, I examine public spaces as a socially produced concept that can be more or less “public” based on social, geographic, and ideological conditions. In this context, neoliberal public space in particular often exhibits implicit encouragement and discouragement of access based on class lines.

The art museum as a site of the public sphere and therefore a public space has been considered in art historical literature as well as museum studies. In light of this, the next portion of the introduction will briefly treat ideological roles and architecture of art museums over time, keeping in mind the shifting “public” to whom the museum addresses itself. This chronology ends with the Guggenheim Bilbao, the first museum well known for being used as a force of urban redevelopment. The next half of the introduction focuses on the Hamilton Addition. I situate the Hamilton Addition in the context of the institutional history of the Denver Art Museum and its physical context in downtown Denver, Colorado. Then I provide an account of responses to the Hamilton Addition upon its opening in 2006, which center on Libeskind’s style and the creation of urban space. Understanding the Hamilton Addition within this context lays the groundwork for my analysis of the Denver Art Museum addition as a product of neoliberal municipal urban planning.
Lefebvre and the Production of Space

While Lefebvre’s writings are immense and dense, my thesis finds its methodological and ideological basis in his seminal work, *The Production of Space* (1974). This work has been influential for post-Marxist urban thinkers, including David Harvey, who was also influential in the conceptualization and direction of this thesis. Without attempting to reductively summarize Lefebvre’s lengthy and complex text, the most relevant part of his work for this thesis is that space is not neutral; “rather, it is the carrier and communicator of the dominant ideologies that contribute to shaping it.”¹ For Lefebvre, space is not an empty geometric abstraction, but is socially constituted, through the power of its makers and users. By rejecting the idea of space as ideologically neutral, Lefebvre comes to an understanding of “social space” as “not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationship in their coexistence and simultaneity – their relative order and/or relative disorder.”² Social space is not a “simple object” or location but is always being produced by social relations.³

For Lefebvre, social relations are dominated by structures of power. He explains that, “As for representations of the relations of production, which subsume power relations, those too occur in space: space contains them in the form of buildings, monuments and work of art.”⁴ According to Lefebvre, the built environment, including buildings, parks, streets act as representations of the power

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid, 33.
structures that allowed them to come into being, either directly or indirectly. For example, the construction of a street might bear the mark of a political leader who lobbied for a street to be placed in a certain location. But it would also bear the mark of the larger structure of capitalism that allowed its physical construction through mass production and dictated the use of the street as a means to facilitate production and consumption. According to Lefebvre, the study of space, and urban space in particular, can act as a “tool for the analysis of society.” In light of this, my thesis understands public spaces at art museums as they are “produced” by urban planning and neoliberal capitalism.

While various power structures contribute to the production of any given space, Lefebvre argues that capitalism is the most influential in shaping space. He writes that, “Capital and capitalism ‘influence’ practical matters relating to space, from the construction of buildings to the distribution of investments and the worldwide division of labor.” Lefebvre calls the space that is dominated by capitalism “abstract space,” in contrast to what may be understood as livable space, which is the site of everyday life. In the context of capitalism, abstract space serves multiple functions; it is a “means of production, an object of consumption, and a property relation.” According to Lefebvre, there are three characteristics of abstract space that allow it to function as a tool in the market. Rosalyn Deustche, art historian and urban theorist, characterizes these three qualities as homogeneity, fragmentation and the presence of a hierarchical order. She explains that, “Abstract space…is homogenous or uniform so that it can be used, manipulated, controlled and exchanged. But within

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5 Ibid, 34.
6 Ibid, 9-10.
the homogenous whole...it is also fragmented into interchangeable parts, so that, as a commodity it can be bought and sold. Abstract space, is further, hierarchically ordered...”

While capitalism’s domination of space is ongoing and enduring, Lefebvre contends that its control is still vulnerable to subversive activity, especially at sites of everyday life. This thesis uses Lefebvre’s contention that space is produced by capitalism to understand the way neoliberalism has influenced the contemporary urban environment.

Neoliberal Space

Capitalism has changed since Lefebvre published *The Production of Space* in 1974. Scholars have continued Lefebvre’s analysis of space’s social production via capitalism to critique neoliberalism as the present day manifestation of capitalism. Recently, academics have contended with the rise, manifestations, and consequences of neoliberalism with renewed urgency in many academic fields including urban studies. Because it provides the backdrop against which this thesis engages with urban planning and public space, I will provide a short introduction to neoliberalism as it relates to urban policy. Jason Hackworth defines neoliberalism as “an ideological rejection of egalitarian liberalism in general and the Keynesian welfare state, in particular, combined with a selected return to the ideas of classical liberalism.”

The resurgence of classical liberal ideals or neoliberalism can be characterized by...

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8 Ibid
advocacy of strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. Hackworth finds that “Good governance at the municipal level is now largely defined by the ability of formal government to assist, collaborate with, or function like the corporate community.” Neoliberalism’s most active site is the municipal level, especially with regards to the urban environment, due to waning federal and state authority and the continued global movement of capital. Neoliberal city governance is entrepreneurial, engaging in speculative practices aimed at benefitting the private sector in the hopes of benefitting the public. Urban policy in the neoliberal city favors upper and middle class citizens at the cost of the public as a whole. Indeed, neoliberal policies are characterized by a shift away from priorities of equity and inclusion, such as public housing, redistributive welfare, food stamps, and labor unions, etc.

Neoliberal policies provide an “opportunity rather than an assault” for privileged social groups, eroding access to the city as a “social, political, and livable commons.”

Neoliberalism is highly visible at the municipal level, yet the strength of city government is both compromised and abetted by its presence. Due to waning government funds, public-private partnerships (including Business Improvement Districts and Tax Increment Financing) are popular models for attaching private revenue to municipal urban projects. While public-private partnerships provide much-needed capital for public projects, they have considerable leeway in influencing

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12 Ibid.
15 Business Improvement Districts collect additional taxes from businesses in a defined area in order to fund projects within the district. Tax Increment Financing promotes public expenditures that are
projects. In other words, the entities and groups that stand to benefit from municipal urban policy often have considerable power in making it. The rise of entrepreneurialism in city governance also strengthens economic competition between cities for jobs, investment, and desirable residents.\textsuperscript{16} Scholars have characterized neoliberal urban policy as place-based, in that it entails the competition of cities as sites for investment. Harvey notes that neoliberal urban policies attempt to “maximize the attractiveness of the local site as a lure for capitalist development.”\textsuperscript{17} Harvey goes on to say that, “The selling of the city as a location for activity depends heavily upon the creation of an attractive urban imagery.”\textsuperscript{18} Neoliberal urban policy manifests in image-based schemes that market the assets of a city (rather than just its geography or natural resources) for investors, tourists, and potential residents. In the context of neoliberalism, the image of the city as an ideal location for investment and consumption is just as important as the physical city itself. This dichotomy between the urban environment as physical place and attractive image will be explored in this thesis, especially with the construction of iconic museums.

Neoliberalism’s ubiquitous influence on municipalities looking to entice investors has led to a relatively uniform approach to urban policy across political and geographic boundaries. This model has evolved over time since neoliberalism’s origins in the 1970s, especially with regards to urban megaprojects, but the “recipe” for contemporary urban policy has remained static. As mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century disinvestment of the urban core and waning industrialism had left inner cities

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\textsuperscript{16} Brash, \textit{Bloomberg’s New York}, 5
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\textsuperscript{17} David Harvey, “From Mangerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” \textit{Geografiska Annaler} 71.1 (1989): 5.
\end{flushleft}
underused, neoliberal urban policy found a location for drastic economic profit in disinvested downtowns. Hackworth explains that, “Redeveloping commercial spaces in central business districts has become arguably the most high-profile form of economic development for cities in the US since the 1970s.”

Hackworth continues to characterize neoliberalism’s influence on the inner city as, “restructuring by niche real estate, service sector employment, tourism, and other replacements for waning heavy manufacturing.”

Taking cues from Jane Jacobs’s theories expressed her 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and related concepts associated with the later movement known as New Urbanism, residential and commercial development in the inner city tends to be high-density, mixed-use and pedestrian based. While this development is private, cities encourage it through zoning and megaproject-based investment in areas that can easily be redeveloped, that are often populated by low-income and minority communities.

Characteristic of neoliberal urbanism, urban megaprojects, such as sports stadia, convention centers, parks, and art museums are intended to increase property values, attract new investment nearby, and draw tourists and foot traffic to underutilized areas. In particular, art museums are frequently used as urban megaprojects because they allow cities to advertise themselves as locations of arts and culture, which tends to attract wealthier individuals. In terms of consumption, the long open hours of art museums allow them to attract a steady stream of visitors who might be inclined to spend money nearby, in contrast to theaters and sports stadia, which feature a spike of activity and footfall during performances or games, but lay

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18 Ibid, 13.
19 Ibid, 170.
dormant when not in use. Because they are municipally funded, although often through public-private partnerships, urban megaprojects are public, but are generally aimed at a public with money to spend. In this way, neoliberal public space is a vehicle for economic development. The demands of private enterprise on public space thus influence the types of public spaces that are created and the publics that are welcome in those spaces.

**The Production of Public Space**

While the term “public space” is used with frequency in both academic and planning discourses, its definition is rarely examined in depth. Resting on a complicated definition of “public” that is often unaddressed, public space can be approached by an examination of its use in practice and theories of its ideal state. Much of public space’s “public-ness” comes from its use by the public, regardless of whether it is publicly or privately owned. For example, privately owned spaces such as Rockefeller Center are in effect, public, because they are widely used by the public and are open in terms of access. Therefore, a significant portion of what makes public space “public” is its use in practice, regardless of its status of ownership. In *The Politics of Public Space*, Neil Smith and Setha Low list characteristics of public space, which is often defined in opposition to private space. They write that, “Public space is traditionally differentiated from private space in terms of the rules of access, the source and nature of control over entry of space, individual and collective behavior sanctioned in specific spaces, and rules of use.”

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practice, or in use, is therefore social. It depends upon the users’ recognition that a space is public and influences the types of behaviors and interactions that happen within it.

There is also a theoretical approach to understanding public space and its constitutive public which is influenced by Habermas’ and the Frankfurt School’s conception of the public sphere. The theory of the public sphere was based on Habermas’ historical examination of the emergence of a bourgeois public culture of debate and discourse through writing in the late 18th century German states. Evidenced by this literary culture, Habermas argued that there existed a “public sphere” that was an idealized social area for discussion of societal issues that could influence the processes of democracy. The public sphere was not materially bound, in that it could occur anywhere that public discourse or debate could reasonably occur, but actually existed in that it had a physical manifestation in space and time.

The theory of the public sphere relies on the dichotomy between public and private. Habermas describes public affairs as “open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs” or private affairs. Therefore, the public sphere is the “sphere of private people come together as a public.” The public sphere lies in between the private sphere of family and civil society (a realm of formal and informal institutions engaged in non-state activities) and the state. Although the “public” of the public sphere has been questioned since *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was published, on the grounds that it is bourgeois and therefore not inclusive, the idea of the public sphere has remained a popular one for theorists. Indeed, many critical

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theorists have expanded notions of the bourgeois public sphere to “be effectively reconstituted under radically different socio-economic, political, and cultural traditions.”

While Habermas traced the historical precedent of the public sphere, he was less concerned with its spatial embodiment. However, public space is widely considered to be the spatial manifestation of the public sphere as a location of social interaction and discussion. Don Mitchell invokes this distinction writing, “The materiality of this [public] sphere is, so to speak, immaterial to its functioning. Public space, meanwhile, is material. It constitutes an actual site, a place, a ground within and from which political activity flows.”

The ideal of public space is thus a space that is ‘open’ in terms of access for all members of society and that acts as a site for social dialogue. Smith and Low explain that, “Public space...emerges according to Habermas’ account of the public sphere, ‘between civil society and the state.’” For definitions of public space influenced by the public sphere, public space becomes public due to its use by private individuals as site of social interaction, especially democratic discourse.

Definitions of public space derived from the public sphere focus on the activity that occurs within the space as a marker of its status as public. For example, public parks, while being ‘public’ in that they are open and accessible also serve as locations for democratic discourse and protest. Art museums and their surrounding urban spaces are considered public spaces because they are relatively open in terms of

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23 Ibid, 26.
24 Thomas McCarthy, introduction to The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society by Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), xii.
access, but they can also act as a host for confronting political and social issues by “private people come together as a public” in Habermas’ terms. Art museums’ exhibitions and internal programming constitutes a form of social and political dialogue, even if it is mainly aesthetic. Public spaces at art museums can also be locations of political dialogue and protests. For example, in the fall of 2015, artists and activists protested the Brooklyn Art Museum for hosting a conference for real estate developers that protesters argued facilitated further gentrification in Brooklyn.27 Therefore, art museums in both their internal and external spaces are public spaces with a critical democratic function.

Lefebvre does not write specifically about “public space,” but his contention that space is socially produced provides a helpful basis for an understanding of public space. In keeping with Lefebvre, Smith and Low suggest that, “the scale of public space and of the public sphere is socially produced, is a matter of intense political struggle and an object of historical change.”28 Although the ideal of public space is historically inspired by the Greek agora, its manifestations have varied over time, as have the constitutive publics that use it. Therefore, public space is not a fixed, static concept, but is shaped both by its users and the entities that have control of it, either public or private. There are many contingent variations of public space, and as one of these, I examine neoliberal public space, as a contemporary and prominent manifestation of public space. Neoliberal public space is widely seen as increasingly privatized in terms of ownership and access, characterized by an erosion of access for

26 Low and Smith, The Politics of Public Space, 4.
28 Low and Smith, The Politics of Public Space, 7.
marginalized people, especially the homeless.\textsuperscript{29\textsuperscript{30}} Lefebvre’s analysis of the homogenizing effects of capital on space is relevant here, as he writes that the processes of capitalism “conflate[s] ‘public’ space with the ‘private’ space of the hegemonic class” which “distributes the various social strata and classes…across the available territory, keeping them separate and prohibiting all contacts.” Lefebvre and post-Marxist urban thinkers criticize neoliberal public space because it is often controlled by private entities such as public-private partnerships, which have a history of removing the homeless in order to protect property values. In the case of the public spaces examined in this thesis, issues of exclusion cited by the authors above including Mitchell & Staeheli and McCann raise regarding exclusion are relevant, but are less extreme. Therefore, drawing from Lefebvre and these thinkers, I question the assumption that public space is always “public,” examining the implicit public associated with neoliberal public spaces and by extension art museums.

The Art Museum and the Public

The art museum has conventionally been understood as a location of the public sphere and therefore a public space. Jennifer Barrett considers this relationship in \textit{Museums and the Public Sphere}. She re-examines the word “public,” arguing that is often invoked carelessly by museum professionals and museum studies scholars. She argues that a more nuanced understanding of the term public facilitates a clearer understanding of the museum as “public” institution and a public space. Indeed,

scholars have considered the art museum and its relationship to shifting publics over time, which Andrew McClellan has described “a gradual and uneven shift” from private to public. The art museum’s role in relation to the groups that have constituted the museum’s “public” has varied over time. This chronology begins with the origins of the art museum as 17th century German princely collections open to a limited public and ends with extended public outreach, education and programming at contemporary art museums. The study of the museum as an architectural type and its evolution over time has also received considerable academic attention. Because the museum’s role and architectural form have remained linked, this thesis’ introduction to the history of the public art museum will treat both simultaneously. While the history of the art museum is not the topic of this thesis, a discussion of the public art museum over time will help to situate the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Hamilton Addition within the architectural and institutional history of art museums as “public” institutions.

The public associated with the museum has shifted over time. The earliest form of the art museum was the Kunstkammer, or cabinet of curiosities, a German prince’s collection of rare objects. These private collections, which were open to a very limited public of the prince’s guests and scholars, are considered the origins of the public art museum. Kunstkammers functioned as an expression of the prince’s power and discriminating taste. Scholars consider the monumental museum or national museum as the next historical embodiment of the art museum. The Louvre

typifies this museum as a “monument to the bourgeois state as it was emerging in the age of democratic revolutions.” While the Louvre, and other national museums emerging in the late 18th century, were expressions of the power of newly created democratic states, their audiences were still relatively elite, as museums did little to make themselves or the art they displayed accessible to a wider public. Other museums of this type were built in a neoclassical style, as “temples” to art. Although the Louvre adapted use of a palace for display of its collections, its style and spatial layout was influential for future museums. Beaux-Arts-trained architects continued the symmetrical, processional layout of the Louvre in progressive era museums in the late 1800s. These museums, such as Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts and the Cleveland Museum of Art aimed to “provide training in design, uplifting recreation and improved taste among the masses in industrialized cities.” Unlike the Louvre and other European museums as testaments to emerging national power, these museums were supported by American businessmen and represented their economic and cultural power. While the next historical form of the museum and display practices is a deliberately neutralizing one, the museum’s ideal or intended public remains a question to this day.

Contemporary museumgoers are most familiar with the “white cube” model of museum architecture and exhibition design, which can be traced to the rise of International Style architecture. Designed by Phillip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone, the Museum of Modern Art (1939), sparked modernism’s enduring influence

on the architecture of art museums. MoMA’s minimal metal, glass, and white marble curtain wall façade broke with traditions of heavily ornamented Beaux-Arts museum buildings (Figure 3). Its interior organization, facilitated by its modernist columnar grid, featured partition walls that could be easily moved with changing exhibitions. MoMA’s white, orthogonal gallery spaces became the dominant mode for the display of art for the rest of the century. The prevalence of MoMA as a model rests upon the idea that the interior or exterior architecture of a museum ought not overshadow the art that it contains or displays. The question of the public for mid-century art museums during the height of modernism seems to be less explored in the literature. Debates between curatorial staff and educational staff occurred over their respective authority and the nature of the museum as a teaching institution for a small, educated public of students and academics or as a more widely accessible educational institution for communities. Low-income and minority communities increasingly contested their representations and access to art museums in this era as well.

Opened in 1959, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum was a deliberate alternative to MoMA’s pared down forms (Figure 4). Andrew McClellan explains that, “Like a Beaux-Arts temple and in contrast to MoMA, the Guggenheim is set slightly back from the street and stands apart from the surrounding buildings. Wright described his museum as a ‘temple in the park,’ a deliberate throwback reference to the…Metropolitan Museum across the street.” With regards to the public, the museumgoers’ experience of Wright’s continuous ramp was a shared one,

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39 Ibid, 42-43.
unlike the ideal of individual contemplation at MoMA. Indeed, Wright commented that his designs for the Guggenheim would create “a new, more liberal idea of the nature of a public museum” based on shared experiences in space. While the MoMA-inspired white cube gallery continued to be the pre-eminent model for art display, the sculptural form of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim, in both its exterior and interior’s curving galleries, inspired a lineage of sculptural museums in opposition to MoMA, including, notably the Guggenheim Bilbao designed by Frank Gehry. While these museums are well studied for their architects’ styles, the public spaces around them tended to be understudied.

Following Wright’s Guggenheim, the next major museum in this category is Centre Pompidou (1977) designed by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano. While its form was not directly influenced by Wright’s Guggenheim, its playful external façade composed of the building’s structural and mechanical elements, including ducts and pipes, mark it as a sculptural museum-type alongside Wright’s Guggenheim. In addition to the museum’s creative envelope, the Pompidou shifted the role of the museum away from a purely educational institution. The Pompidou has been described as “palpably civic,” with an exciting exterior, urban plaza, a performing arts space, and a café aimed at courting a wide swath of residents in Paris and tourists by combining entertainment, consumption, and education. While its long-standing popularity, especially with tourists, has been attributed to its intriguing and colorful “high-tech” architecture, its expansive public spaces, such as the piazza on its western edge and the café on the first floor, contribute to its popularity as an open and

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40 Ibid, 79.
41 Ibid, 80.
accessible institution (Figure 5). In addition to its cultivation of an expanded audience, the Pompidou ushered in an era of art museums as a force of urban development. The Pompidou was the linchpin of the Parisian government’s attempt to redevelop the historic neighborhood of the Marais ushered in the era of museums as a force of urban development. While the Parisian approach to urban change in the Marais is distinct from contemporary neoliberal planning, the union of municipal planning and art museum interests suggests a turning point in conceptualization of the role of the museum.

One of the mandates of contemporary museum building after the Pompidou is urban redevelopment. She writes that, “Shopping, eating, performances, along with fund-raising and urban renewal, now vie with the preservation and exhibition of art as museum mandates.” Perhaps the most famous use of a museum in the context of urban revitalization is the Guggenheim Bilbao, which is treated in the first chapter of this thesis. Located in a previously economically depressed city in northern Spain, the Guggenheim Bilbao was designed by Frank Gehry and opened in 1997. Its success at drawing tourists to the city and reinvigorating investment in Bilbao’s urban environment launched a new trend that wedded municipal neoliberal urban redevelopment schemes with museum building. The Guggenheim Bilbao has become the model for other museums and municipalities to use a famous architect like Gehry to design a daring postmodern structure for an art museum in order to attract tourists and spur urban development. Santiago Calatrava’s addition to the Milwaukee Art

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42 Ibid.
44 Ibid, 11.
Museum (opened 2004) and Libeskind’s addition to the Denver Art Museum (2006) are both considered to be influenced by Gehry’s Guggenheim and its agenda of urban revitalization. This thesis provides a unique approach to studying art museums by situating them within the context of urban planning, as most art historical research privileges the study of the museum buildings’ architecture over urban planning. In addition, the study of public space at these two museums helps address new questions about the relationship between art museums and the public in the 21st century.

The Hamilton Addition as a Case Study in Neoliberal Public Space

Because the majority of this thesis treats the Hamilton Addition in relation to its urban context, this portion of the introduction considers the urban landscape near the Hamilton Addition as well as its museum’s critical reception. To help situate the Hamilton Addition in its urban context, I will provide a short history and description of the area in which the Hamilton Addition is located. The Denver Art Museum is located within a rich network of civic buildings, arts institutions, and public space. The Hamilton Addition sits at 13th street in between Bannock Street and Acoma Street, at a crucial meeting point between Civic Center Park to its north and the Golden Triangle to its south (Figure 6). Civic Center Park is a green space surrounded by historic civic building bounded by Colfax Avenue on the north and 14th Street on the south and Grant Street on the east and Bannock streets on the west. The Civic Center contains the State Capitol Building, Denver’s City and County Building, and the Carnegie Library. The buildings have relatively uniform style that uses conventional classical iconography to express the values of democracy and civic governance. The only notable exception is that of the Denver Public Library (1955)
which was designed by Burnham Hoyt, a local architect, in the International Style (Figure 7). Indiana limestone veneer creates material continuity between the library and the other Civic Center buildings. Led by mayor Robert Speer after he saw the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition, the park aimed to make Denver a new “Paris on the Platte.” Civic Center Park opened in 1906, and has undergone various revisions by landscape architects such as Charles M. Robinson, Frederick Law Olmstead Jr., and Edward H. Bennett. The influence of City Beautiful and Beaux-Arts planning is apparent in the park’s pedestrian promenades, landscaping, and classical motifs and structures such as the Voorhies Greek Theater. These park and its landscaping create a sense of monumentality and emphasize democratic governance. The plan is mostly symmetrical and features elliptical bends at 14th and Colfax streets that bookend the park. The most emphasized pedestrian pathway moves north to south between these two streets. Denver’s Beaux-Arts Civic Center represents the city’s attempt to assert its democratic values through architecture and landscape.

The Denver Art Museum

Founded in 1893, the Denver Art Museum has seen various shifts in organization and location. Much of the DAM’s history in the 20th century is marked by a lack of public funding and the strong guidance of its directors, namely the director of the DAM from 1944 to 1983, Otto Bach. In an essay written for the DAM’s centennial in 1993, Neil Harris explains that, “The history of this museum

45 “Burnham Hoyt.” Denver Public Library. https://www.denverlibrary.org/content/burnham-hoyt
demonstrates the critical significance of administrative leadership and curatorial vision...Growth was sustained by a series of stubborn and idiosyncratic enthusiasts working inside the institution and prepared to wait for the day when Denver patrons would be ready to back up their regional ambitions by appropriate generosity.” The financial relationship between the DAM and Denver’s city government has shifted over time. The museum received little funding from the city throughout most of the 20th century, but with the rise of neoliberal urban and cultural policy in Denver, it enjoyed relative ease in obtaining funding for improvements and the construction of the Hamilton Addition.

The presence or absence of municipal funding has affected the architecture of the DAM throughout its existence. Until 1965, this manifested in the DAM refurbishing existing structures for museum purposes. In the years after it was founded, the DAM occupied various venues, with its collection often split between more than one location. In 1948, after an unsuccessful attempt to secure municipal funding for a new building to house the entire collection, the DAM purchased land occupied by an auto garage at 14th and Acoma Street. In 1949, the DAM opened in the newly renovated Schleier Memorial Gallery designed by Burnham Hoyt with help from Otto Bach. Hoyt refurbished the garage, giving it a restrained modernist façade and large display windows to attract visitors to the museum. Its interior was an open plan with movable partitions to facilitate changing exhibition design.

Despite the museum’s successful renovation of a structure expressly for the museum’s collection, the DAM continued efforts to construct a new building. With

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90% of the collection in storage and an impending donation of valuable paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation that required air conditioning and fireproofing, museum director Otto Bach felt that a new building was necessary to unify the DAM’s existing collection and solicit high quality donations.\textsuperscript{49} The DAM managed to get on the ballot for a bond issue for the construction of a new building in 1952, but the bond was resoundingly defeated. Shortly after, the museum decided to refurbish another building on its site with private funds, which opened as the South Wing in 1954. The South Wing was also designed by Burnham Hoyt and has an aesthetic sensibility similar to the Schleier Gallery's, with a smooth stone façade and minimal ornamentation. Fulfilling the Kress Foundation’s requirements, the South Wing was built with fireproof galleries and climate control.\textsuperscript{50} While the Schleier Gallery has been demolished, the South Wing has been partially subsumed into the North Building, and currently contains the DAM’s upscale restaurant. The DAM’s early history at this site suggests the museum’s persistent struggle to find and fund space.

Under Bach’s leadership, the museum continued to develop its collection and audience throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. However, it was apparent that the museum needed more space. A 1961 editorial in the Denver Post lamented that large traveling exhibitions, such as a Van Gogh exhibition that had visited similar size cities, skipped Denver because the DAM couldn’t accommodate them.\textsuperscript{51} She wrote that, “Denver is no longer a cow town,” and hence deserved a flourishing art

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 40.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
museum.\textsuperscript{52} While the DAM’s permanent collection was the justification for the first two structures on the site, the desire for temporary exhibitions buoyed support for this addition. Upon securing $1 million in city funding and $5.5 million from donations, the DAM decided to build. The distribution of funding sources suggests that the DAM’s motivation to build was mainly internal, although this was the first large sum given to the DAM by the city of Denver to patronize architecture for the museum.

The DAM’s assertion of its importance as a cultural venue in Denver is apparent in the style of architecture at its new addition. The museum’s success in obtaining municipal funds suggested a new level of legitimacy for the institution, but the DAM wanted to continue to raise its profile through architecture by hiring an important international architect. A board member commented that the DAM wanted, “the glamour that a famous international name…will add to our program. This should add greater saleability locally, and most certainly nationally, and could attract substantial gifts from outside our immediate area.”\textsuperscript{53} In 1970, the Denver Art Museum hired Italian architect Gio Ponti to design the addition. His status as an international, modernist architect well known for designing the Pirelli Tower in Milan, Italy (1958) played the largest role in his selection. Because of financial constraints, he only designed the façade of the structure and remained in Italy throughout the design and construction process. The interior was designed by James Sudler and Associates in conjunction with Otto Bach.\textsuperscript{54} The presence of an

\textsuperscript{52} While this might seem like an overstatement of the influence of one editorial, Denver’s cultural aspirations to become more than just a “cow town” reoccur well into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, and are especially present in conversations surrounding the Hamilton Addition.


\textsuperscript{54} Georgia Lucas Lindsay, “The Denver Art Museum and the Bilbao Effect” (PhD diss., University of Berkeley, California, 2013), 8.
institutional strategy that used international and unconventional architecture to attract attention suggests that the North Building can be seen as a precursor to the Bilbao-inspired Libeskind building.55

Unveiled as Ponti’s only building in the United States, the North Building’s opening in 1971 marked the fulfillment of the DAM’s decades-long attempts to build its own building. The Ponti building is seven stories high, and composed of two towers with the corners removed, which create an irregular, twenty-four sided form (Figure 8). Otto Bach played a significant role in designing the interior. He regulated the size of the gallery spaces and divided the floors of the museum to each contain only one type of art. These interventions increased clarity by enabling the visitor to choose what type of art to see and directly go there, rather than having to navigate through galleries to find a particular collection in order to decrease museum fatigue.56 Ponti’s façade is visually arresting, clad in thousands of glass tiles that reflect the sunlight. Geometric slits that are windows dot the skin of the building. These windows offer views of the Rockies and downtown Denver from inside the galleries, and serve as ornamentation on the façade. Shapes are also “cut out” from the top of the façade to enliven the top of the structure and frame exterior views of Denver’s landscape (Figure 9). The Ponti building’s crenellated tile exterior and parapet-like outlines evoked a fortress or castle-like effect, signifying the role of the museum as a protector and defender of art. While critics lambasted Ponti’s daunting fortress at the time, it fulfilled the DAM’s institutional goals of increased recognition and visitor clarity.

Furthermore, the Ponti building paved the way for forty years of experimental and unconventional civic architecture nearby.

The Denver Central Library’s addition by Michael Graves (1995) brought another piece of remarkable architecture to the area (Figure 10). The exaggerated and colorful forms of the Graves’ addition are not as stark as the neoclassical buildings in Civic Center Park, but his postmodern revival of neoclassical forms speak the same language as the buildings of older civic institutions. The façade has “clearly articulated masses that express their functions,” such as the wide drum that makes up the library’s reading room. To exaggerate form following function, Graves uses bright colors to highlight each structural portion of the building. While Graves uses classical sources as models for civic buildings, the seven story addition with its façade facing 13th street, shifted emphasis away from Civic Center Park towards the south. This marked the beginning of a trend of expansion of public space originating from the Civic Center Park moving southward. Indeed, the DAM responded by opening another entrance on Acoma, in addition to formerly singular entrance at 14th street. These two moves reveal the intentional expansion of civic institutions from Civic Center Park through the use of public space. In addition to physical linkage between civic institutions in terms of public space, these institutions became formally linked by joining the Civic Center Cultural Complex in the mid-1990s. The Denver Public Library, the DAM, and the Colorado Historical Society joined a coalition to unify their disparate institutions that focused on education and Western history and culture. This thesis will explore the Civic Center Cultural District in its chapters, but it is

important to note that since the 1990s civic institutions in this area including the DAM have been institutionally and physically linked.

The Hamilton Addition contributed another piece of unconventional civic architecture to Denver’s Civic Center. The DAM revived the trend of hiring an international architect to design an unconventional museum building after Ponti in hiring hired Daniel Libeskind to design a new addition to the museum in 1999. The Davis Partnership was the local architectural firm and contracting was done by MA Mortenson Company. A $62.5 million municipal bond issue and $47 million fundraised by museum trustees paid for the addition. The museum wing is located directly to the south of the Ponti building, connected by a pedestrian footbridge over 13th street (Figure 11). In addition to the museum wing, the city and museum built a parking facility wrapped with luxury condominiums. The condominiums and parking garage are on the west side of the site along Broadway. Libeskind’s designs recommended the closure of Acoma between 12th and 13th streets, which enabled the creation of Acoma Plaza for the Arts, a public space between the museum and the related condominiums.

While the Ponti Building is a fortress for art, the Hamilton Addition evokes the energy of the creation of art. The Libeskind building is aggressively angular, with soaring triangular shapes that emulate the Rockies to the west of the building. The interior spaces follow the forms of the exterior so there are no orthogonal walls in the museum, enabled by a steel frame with a concrete foundation. The only vertical spaces in the structure are emergency exit stairwells and elevator shafts. Interior spaces are organized around a central light-filled atrium that extends the height of the building. While the exhibition spaces are relatively separate from each other, each
floor contains multiple galleries, unlike Bach’s careful designs at the Ponti Building (Figure 12). The grand staircase, which is located in the atrium, is emphasized (unlike the elevator in the Ponti building) as the mode of processing through the museum, affording visitors alternately changing views of the angular architecture. The Hamilton Addition is clad in titanium, recalling the glass tiles on the Ponti Building, which produces spectacular effects with the Denver sunlight.

While the Hamilton Addition’s structure and its formation of urban space are equally important to its overall effect, its style tends to preoccupy viewers and critics. The Hamilton Addition’s style can be considered on three levels. First, it is an example of a period style of fragmented, deconstructivist architecture that is often associated with the museum as a type in the 21st century. The second can be located in Libeskind’s oeuvre or the development of his style over his career. The last is style as received and assimilated by the patron and viewer, or users of the building. While this paper is mostly concerned with the Hamilton Addition’s employment of public space, understanding these three uses of the term style in reference to the Hamilton Addition will be helpful as they will be alternately discussed throughout this thesis.

The Hamilton Addition was conceived as a project that would include other public and private developments on the site. Studio Libeskind designed the Museum Residences, a condominium development, for Mile High Development, a Denver-based real estate developer. Corporex Corporation was the private equity firm backing the project.58 A mixed-use residential development, the Museum Residences are a seven-floor structure wrapped around an above-ground parking unit. The top

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six floors are luxury condominiums and the bottom floor is retail space. A glass skin with shard-like metal ornamentation echoes the Hamilton Addition, but is pared down compared with the museum building (Figure 13). The glass skin is regulated by metal latticework, emphasizing orthogonality relative to the Hamilton Addition. The interior spaces of the Residences are also orthogonal, unlike the Hamilton Addition. Another private venture on the site, a luxury hotel, was planned to be open soon after the Hamilton Addition. It was delayed because of the 2008 Recession, but opened as the ART Hotel in 2015. The luxury hotel is on the corner of Broadway and 13th, and features art on loan from the DAM.  

While the Recession marked a pause in construction near the Hamilton Addition, construction continued on the site after the effects of the Recession wore off. After the widow of modernist painter Clyfford Still donated her collection and archives to the City of Denver, a museum in his name was designed to be a part of the Civic Center Cultural Complex. Brad Coepfel of the Oregon-based firm, Allied Works Architecture, designed the museum. It is located next to the Hamilton Addition at 13th and Bannock Street. The relatively small 28,500 square foot museum is set back from the street within a green space. It is made of cast-in-place concrete walls, with thin lines of textured relief in the concrete (Figure 14). The museum is small and understated, using an organic and minimal language unlike the other structures nearby. Similarly, the DAM's Bannock Administration Building, on the corner of Bannock and 12th Street, uses a reserved language. Opened in 2014, the

Bannock Administration Addition contains additional office space. Designed after the completion of the Hamilton Addition, its materials of glass and light colored stone complement its surrounding context of architecturally dominant structures such as the Ponti and Libeskind buildings. The Hamilton Addition lives within a network of civic and urban spaces, as well as arts, government, and residential uses. Understanding this network and its history is a necessary starting place for contextualizing the Hamilton Addition’s role within its urban space.

**Critical and Scholarly Responses to the Hamilton Addition**

The next portion of this introduction treats criticism of the Hamilton Addition in academic sources and national and local newspapers. Reception of the Hamilton Addition focuses on the following issues: Libeskind’s style, the evolving museum type, urban space, and the Bilbao Effect. A considerable portion of critical response to the Hamilton Addition focused on Libeskind’s deconstructivist style. Indeed, the Hamilton Addition is quintessential Libeskind, using a vocabulary of angles, slashes, voids, and material choices of metal. While Libeskind’s powerful Jewish Museum in Berlin married form and content, critics have focused on the lack of symbolic resonance Libeskind’s successive buildings, including the Hamilton Addition. Although the Hamilton Addition was Libeskind’s first building in the United States, critics point to a downward progression in the quality of Libeskind’s architecture over his career. Comments from articles in newspapers about the Hamilton Addition included that Libeskind “has in recent years unraveled into something resembling
kitsch” and has become a “a caricature of his own aesthetic.” Critic Eric Chen writes that, “the crystal-like shards and prisms that have become Libeskind’s signature forms have devolved into a rhetorical catchall.” Although Libeskind maintained that the angular forms of the Hamilton Addition were inspired by the Rockies, tying the Hamilton Addition to its context, critics were resoundingly unconvinced of the relevance and lasting power of Libeskind’s distinctive style.

The next category of responses to the Hamilton Addition concerns its function as an art museum. In this regard, the Hamilton Addition received mixed reviews. Blair Kamin of the Chicago Tribune called the Hamilton Addition a “disappointingly spotty art museum” because of its inaccessibility to both visitors and the art it displays. However, others pointed to the expanded possibilities that non-conventional gallery spaces afforded curators and the DAM. Criticism of the Hamilton Addition focuses on two problems, the first of which is the architecture’s effects on visitors (or how visitors experience the building), and the second is the architecture’s effect on the art.

Critics frequently cited problems with use and accessibility because of the building’s interior angled spaces. Articles published after the building’s opening noted that the building was dangerous to blind patrons because they could hit their heads on the angled walls. The DAM solved this problem by placing wood barriers on the floor next to particularly sloped walls, which was a necessary step to ensure the safety of its visitors, but detracted stylistically from the effect of the walls. Critics also pointed

63 Chen, “A Civic Act,” 120.
to visitor confusion, especially in locating the ticket counter, upon the Hamilton Addition’s opening, as another example of its inaccessibility. The DAM addressed these problems with clearer signage and more docents. While any building opening experiences disjunction between design and use, these critics expressed that the Hamilton Addition’s impressive architecture was made at the expense of the comfort, safety and ease of users of the building.

The next dimension of criticism relating to the Hamilton Addition focuses on its perceived failure as a space for exhibiting art. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, preferred methods of exhibition design and art display have evolved along with the art museum as an architectural type. While the sculptural art museum is on the rise, the MoMA-inspired “white cube” gallery is still the dominant mode of art display (Figure 16). Therefore critics often take issue with “sculptural art museums,” which have interiors or exteriors that are non-orthogonal, such as the Hamilton Addition. Criticism of sculptural museums contends that both the exterior architecture and the interior gallery spaces can distract museumgoers from fully appreciating the art within. The first concern is that the architecture upstages the art it contains, because visitors come to see the building instead of the art. The second exception critics take is that the architecture distracts visitors from viewing the art. This criticism is especially relevant for the Hamilton Addition because the slanted walls of the galleries forced curators to use physical interventions in order to display art (Figure 16). For example, Larry Shiner explains that, “…more conventional works, especially paintings, are either overwhelmed or else one is distracted by the

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65 Ibid.
braces that are used to hold them vertical…” Of the Hamilton Addition, Blair Kamin writes that, “…all too often in this building the art is forced to accommodate the architecture rather than the other way around.” In contrast to the dominant white-cube model of gallery display, the Hamilton’s angular spaces have offended critics and visitors who expect minimal spaces that privilege art over architecture. Nicolai Ouroussoff of the *New York Times* wrote of the Hamilton that, “In a building of canted walls and asymmetrical rooms…it is virtually impossible to enjoy the art.” Responses to the Hamilton regarding its exhibition spaces were generally negative because of its architecture’s overwhelming presence in the galleries.

While the Hamilton Addition received mostly negative criticism concerning Libeskind’s style and its display of art, it received favorable comments regarding its relationship to urban space. Even writers who criticized the museum pointed to its successes in the context of urban landscape. Critics referred to the Hamilton Addition as a “surprisingly sensitive shaper of urban space,” a “contemporary spin on urban context,” and a “tour de force on urbanistic grounds alone.” Positive comments focused on the Hamilton’s ability to unify the stylistically dissonant architecture of Graves’ library addition, the Ponti Building, and the Hamilton Addition in the service of connecting nearby neighborhoods. Blair Kamin, who heavily criticized the interior of the building, wrote that, “While his addition appears to be a self-referential object,

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68 Kamin, “Rocky Mountain Highs and Lows.”
69 Ouroussoff, “A Razor-Sharp Profile Cuts Into a Mile-High City.”
70 Blair Kamin, “Rocky Mountain Highs and Lows.”
71 Ibid.
it actually succeeds brilliantly in weaving together disparate parts of the cityscape.”

Indeed, critics emphasized the symbolic and physical connection that the Hamilton Addition enabled between Civic Center Park and the Golden Triangle. Kamin noted the importance of the site plan in linking the closest residential neighborhood, the Golden Triangle, and the Civic Center. Susan Barnes-Gelt, a local reporter, wrote that the pedestrian plaza, replacing a street, on Acoma was a key element of area’s urban design in connecting these two areas. Critics also noted the resonance between the form of the Hamilton Addition and its greater urban landscape, such as the jagged forms reflecting the triangular street grid of the Golden Triangle, and its dramatic prow pointing over 13th Street towards the Civic Center. Overall, the Hamilton Addition received favorable comments on its relationship to its urban context, which might be surprising considering its dramatic style.

As we will see, the Hamilton Wing as a catalyst for urban redevelopment was modeled on the Guggenheim Bilbao, and responses to Libeskind’s building were framed partly in these terms. After its opening in 1997, the Guggenheim Bilbao’s success at generating tourism and spurring urban development in Bilbao, Spain, has spawned many successors including the Hamilton Addition. A complicated recipe of government spending, private investment, a famous architect, a well-known arts institution and an economically depressed location worked together to enable the unprecedented success of the Guggenheim Bilbao and put Bilbao on the international cultural map as a destination for art and architecture, creating the narrative of the “Bilbao Effect.” The Guggenheim Bilbao was a public-private venture between the

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73 Blair Kamin, “Rocky Mountain Highs and Lows.”
74 Barnes-Gelt, “Playing all the Angles.”
city of Bilbao and the Guggenheim Museum. The Basque Government covered construction costs, created an acquisitions fund, paid a fee to the Guggenheim, and agreed to subsidize the museum’s annual budget, adding up to a $182 million investment. The Guggenheim shared its name, its permanent collection and continues to manage the museum. While this seems like a risky investment for an economically depressed municipality, it was wildly successful. Economist Beatriz Plaza found that the return on investment was complete as early as 7 years after its opening. Bilbao has received 779,028 new yearly overnight stays and has created 907 new full-time jobs, which are directly attributable to the presence of the Guggenheim Bilbao. Overall, the museum and its ripple effect earns $39.9 million annually for Basque treasury. The Guggenheim Bilbao was just one part of a larger project to confront unemployment and urban deterioration in Bilbao through public spending on infrastructure and cultural facilities such as a new subway line, new water and drainage systems, and a new airport.

The Guggenheim Bilbao and other projects like it, such as the Hamilton Addition, reveal the growing trend of investment in cultural institutions and museums that are being used to redevelop urban areas. Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika note this with respect to the Guggenheim Bilbao. They write that these projects depend upon “a powerful interweaving of concepts and plans for new museums within more general projects of urban renewal, giving cities a facelift and a new lease

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
on life.” As mentioned previously, criticism of sculptural museums centers on their effectiveness at displaying art, but discussions of Bilbao-type museums take issue with its use in neoliberal schemes. The first issue is the increasing commodification of the museum. In what seems to be a never-ending expansion from the gift shop, museums continue to rely on monetary mechanisms and are used in larger neoliberal schemes in ways that might detract from the art they are tasked with displaying. Guash and Zulaika note that, “…while previously museums were identified by their collections, now this is by their architecture: In other words, the dominant image is the container, rather than the content.” To critics, the use of the museum as a part of neoliberal development uses the art and the museum as a means to an end, rather than displaying art for art’s sake.

The other issue with museums as catalysts for urban development is their negative impact on access and living in urban areas. Victoria Newhouse writes that, “During the last two decades this role has become increasingly frequent... Because major renewal projects normally spearhead gentrification, dislodging low-income populations, they cause tremendous social and economic upheaval and tend to be highly controversial. New museums or additions are often able to breathe new life into urban areas, but they tend to disregard low-income residents that already live there. Because the Guggenheim Bilbao was widely considered a success by critics and the population of Bilbao, its implication for the future of museums and the areas in which they live is profound and ought to be studied.

79 Ana Maria Guash and Joseba Zulaika, Learning from the Guggenheim Bilbao (Reno: University of Nevada, 2005), 15.
80 Guash and Zulaika, Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim, 16.
81 Newhouse, Towards a New Museum, 194.
Both the Denver Art Museum and its critics see the origins of the Hamilton Addition at Bilbao. The oft-cited story of the idea to build a new museum addition begins with Lewis Sharp, the then-director of the DAM, visiting the opening of the Guggenheim Bilbao in 1997 and exclaiming that, “he wanted one for Denver.”

Regardless of whether or not this is true, the DAM does not hesitate to emphasize its connection to Bilbao. Additionally, there are abundant formal similarities between the two museums, including their material choice (titanium cladding), the selection of a star architect, and the construction of a daring sculptural structure. In addition to architectural similarities, the Hamilton Addition was intended to play a role in developing the long under-used Golden Triangle neighborhood to the south of the addition. The use of an international architect to garner attention at the Ponti Building suggests that these motives are not completely new for Denver, the influence of the Guggenheim Bilbao on the DAM is indisputable.

Georgia Lucas Lindsay’s dissertation entitled “The Denver Art Museum and the Bilbao Effect” (2013) details the effects that Bilbao as a prevailing model of museum building had on the Hamilton Addition. Lindsay chronicles the development of the museum as a type in the wake of the Guggenheim Bilbao, noting that, “A new museum type has emerged, one where the building is as important as the art. This building type serves as a fundraising and advertising tool, not only for the museum but also the city.” In the case of Denver, Lindsay examines what this new museum type means and how it affects its patrons. She writes that she was interested in “the building as a social tool, a new kind of institution and what effect it had on

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perceptions of Denver and the museum” and that she hoped to “understand what impact the radical shape of the building had on patrons and on art display.” While Lindsay points out some practical problems with the Libeskind building, she found that the Hamilton Addition has presented an interesting place to exhibit art in new ways. Lindsay’s dissertation is the point of departure for this project. While Lindsay focuses on the experiences of people visiting and working in Bilbao-inspired museums, I examine public spaces at the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Hamilton Addition.

**Overview**

This thesis has three interrelated concerns: the architecture of art museums, specifically sculptural museums modeled after the Guggenheim Bilbao, neoliberal urban planning, and public space. I examine the emerging museum type that Lindsay and Newhouse identify, one that uses a famous architect to design a unconventional, often deconstructivist, art museum as a part of a larger neoliberal urban revitalization plan. I argue that narratives of the Bilbao Effect downplay the importance of urban planning in affecting the form and urban configurations of these museums. Therefore, my thesis considers the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Hamilton Addition in the context of the urban plans that shaped their ideological, physical, and urban forms. In particular, I provide new readings of the public spaces at both museums. I seek to understand how the urban, public space was created at these museums considering the related, but distinct, intentions of the architect, the city government, and the art museum. In examining public spaces at these museums, I question the invocation of

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83 Lindsay, “The Denver Art Museum and the Bilbao Effect,” 2.
84 Ibid, viii.
the term “public,” and ask to what degree these spaces are public. By extension, I examine the newest type of art museum and the public to which addresses itself.

The first chapter considers the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1997), designed by Frank Gehry, as the first and most famous example of an art museum’s use in a neoliberal urban revitalization plan. In contrast to narratives of the Bilbao Effect, I argue the Guggenheim Bilbao and new public spaces in Bilbao were a part of a broader context of neoliberal urban planning aimed at attracting tourism to the city. The first portion of the chapter analyzes the city’s urban planning from the late 1980s until the construction of the Guggenheim Bilbao. Then I provide a new reading of the Guggenheim Bilbao with respect to its urban landscape and public space, as well as other public spaces built nearby as a product of the city’s urban planning. While an exhaustive study of the Guggenheim Bilbao could be a thesis in its own right, this chapter functions mainly to establish the similar approach to urban planning and museum building at the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Hamilton Addition.

The second chapter examines neoliberal urban planning in Denver from 1989 to 1998. First, I examine the planning initiatives that I argue influenced the desire to build a Bilbao-inspired addition to the Denver Art Museum. In these plans, I focus on the cultivation of arts and culture in Denver as well as the goal of redeveloping Denver’s downtown by encouraging residential and commercial development. Second, I analyze the plans that influenced the urban form of the Hamilton Addition, focusing on the city’s stated desire to connect its Civic Center to the underdeveloped neighborhood to the south of the museum addition.
The third chapter examines the urban form of the Hamilton Addition as influenced by the urban plans examined in the previous chapter. First, I provide a chronology of Daniel Libeskind’s urbanism over his career in order to provide context for his designs for urban space at the Hamilton Addition. The remaining portion of the chapter considers the public spaces at the Hamilton Addition as influenced by Denver’s prior urban planning initiatives.

The last chapter considers urban planning and cultural policy in Denver from 2006 to present. The first half of the chapter considers urban planning and building in Denver’s Civic Center that marked an end to the city’s signature building approach, of which the Hamilton Addition is an example. The second portion of the chapter considers cultural policy in Denver, examining the declining importance of the Denver Art Museum in the city’s planning for cultural policy, attributing it to the rise of Richard Florida’s theory of the Creative Class. I argue that while Denver’s approach to both civic architecture and cultural policy has changed since the opening of the Hamilton Addition, it is still neoliberal.

I conclude by casting doubt on whether the model of Bilbao is sustainable for creating public space and a truly public art museum.
Chapter 1
The Bilbao Effect?
Basque Urban Planning and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

This chapter examines the myth of the Bilbao Effect, situating the Guggenheim Bilbao within the history of Basque urban program that gave rise to the desire to build a cultural facility with architecture so captivating it would become an international symbol of urban revitalization. By examining the Guggenheim Bilbao within its neoliberal planning context as well as its physical context in Bilbao, I provide a new account of how this museum came to be and how its design responded to its surroundings. In this way, this chapter rewrites the narrative of the Guggenheim Bilbao as not emerging solely from the minds of Frank Gehry and Thomas Krens, but as a product of Basque urban planning in the city’s quest to become an international tourist destination. This chapter also offers new readings of public spaces in the district surrounding the Guggenheim Bilbao as products of Basque urban planning efforts.

The world’s fascination with the Guggenheim Bilbao is unsurprising considering its innovative and eye-catching style, its departure from previous styles of museum architecture, and the profound economic and urban changes it has brought to Bilbao. The museum has occupied a precious place in art historical, social science, and media sources as the attraction for tourism, money and a breath of fresh air to the desolate landscape of Bilbao (Figures 1.1). As explored in the introduction of this thesis, the Guggenheim Bilbao’s immediate and far-reaching impact on both Bilbao’s economy and its cityscape has been termed the “Bilbao Effect” or the “Guggenheim
Effect,” used in art historical literature and social science writing respectively.

However, I argue that this understanding of the Guggenheim Bilbao overstates the influence of the museum in Bilbao’s drastic transition towards a cosmopolitan cultural tourist destination. Gerardo del Cerro Santamaría explains that narrative of the Bilbao Effect does not acknowledge, “The usually overlooked fact that Bilbao’s revitalization was not triggered by the impact of the Guggenheim—it was rather a carefully planned process undertaken by the semiautonomous government of the Basque Country.”75 In 1987, Bilbao began a concerted effort to redevelop its economy through economic and urban interventions that would help spur local and foreign investment. Louise Johnson explains that, “Rather than being solely the outcome of a globalizing metropolitan museum, the quest by Bilbao to become an international center of culture around signature buildings and institutions, was part of a well researched local plan for social, urban and economic revitalization, one which mobilized and accelerated the further creation of cultural capital.”76 Bilbao’s massive efforts span from 1987 to present, including projects ranging from a new metro system designed by Norman Foster, a new airport designed by Santiago Calatrava, ecological improvements to the Nervión River, to the construction of the famed Guggenheim Bilbao. This chapter of the thesis situates the Guggenheim Bilbao within the context of Basque neoliberal urban planning, specifically the 1989 Revitalization Plan.77 This chapter examines the Guggenheim Bilbao as the quintessential, but not

77 While I argue that the Guggenheim Bilbao ought to be studied in the context of this history of urban regeneration in Bilbao, and not merely for its style, I acknowledge the profound impact that the
the only Basque urban megaproject, that was influenced by urban policy aimed at reforming Bilbao’s economy by attracting tourism.

Bilbao’s unstable political system and depressed economy were the impetus for such massive regeneration efforts. Located on the Atlantic coast of Northern Spain, Bilbao is the capital of the Basque province. Around 400,000 people live in Bilbao, which is part of a metropolitan area of over 1,000,000 people. The Basques are a cultural minority group in Spain, like the Catalan and the Gallegos, who speak their own language, Euksara. Basque cultural identity has often found itself at odds with a Spanish cultural identity and the politics of the central state. The terrorist group, ETA, which loosely translates to “Free Euskadi,” used violent tactics to propagate Basque power and pride, aimed at the Spanish government. ETA has killed over 800 people since the late 1950s. Cultural approval of the cultural group has fluctuated based on political circumstances in Spain, especially as the Spanish government transitioned from Franco’s totalitarian regime in 1975 to a relatively democratic government. Still, the legacy of political violence in Bilbao made the transition to an open and democratic society a difficult one. Scott Bollens describes ETA’s influence on Basque politics as facilitating the creation of a “culture of silence.” Even after the Spanish state’s transition into democracy, the threat of ETA’s violence lingered. In addition to the local impacts of ETA’s violent tactics, ETA had solidified Bilbao’s image to Spain and the rest of the world as one of strife, violence, and political instability.

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museum itself had on Bilbao’s economy and urban landscape. This chapter seeks to unearth the planning process that is conventionally excluded from writing about the Guggenheim Bilbao, but still understands the urban planning initiated by the Basques before the Guggenheim Bilbao was built and urban changes in response to the museum as interrelated.
Equally as important to Bilbao’s political climate were the drastic effects of Western post-industrialization on Bilbao’s economy. Because of Bilbao’s location near the coast, it had historically been a prominent center for steel, shipbuilding, and textile manufacturing.\textsuperscript{88} In the 1950s and 1960s, Bilbao’s economy was bolstered by Franco’s policies of import protection, anti-union laws, and allocation of resources to industrialists. Once Franco’s protectionist policies were ended and the full force of the regional economic shift away from industrial production hit, Bilbao experienced a loss of investments, high unemployment, out-migration and urban degradation.\textsuperscript{89} Between 1970 and 1990, metropolitan Bilbao had lost 20 percent of its population and 47 percent of its industrial jobs. In 1993, unemployment in Bilbao was 25%.\textsuperscript{90} Years of heavy reliance on industry left Bilbao’s economy unable to keep up as Spain’s economy entered the Post-Fordist phase. Bilbao’s turn to neoliberalism is unsurprising, considering the origins of the rise of neoliberalism lied in the economic effects of post-industrialization. In addition to a depressed economy, the legacy of political violence in Bilbao made it difficult for the government to intervene in meaningful ways. Scott Bollens explains that, “The politics of Basque nationalism was antagonistic to and obstructive of assertive public interventions that would be needed to restructure and revitalize Bilbao.”\textsuperscript{91} ETA’s violent policies against the central government prevented the cooperation and interaction necessary to rebuilding Bilbao. The city’s declining economy and incapacitated government comprised the context that sparked the desire to “rebuild” Bilbao.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Bollens, \textit{Intervening in Politically Turbulent Cities: Spaces, Buildings, and Boundaries}, 88.
The steady decline of Bilbao’s economy also contributed to the deterioration of its natural resources and built environment. Abandoned industrial factories overwhelmed its landscape. Indeed, “the city contained 465 hectares of industrial ruins, up to 50% of the total industrial land in some municipalities.” Additionally, environmental pollution from the height of industrialism had never been addressed. Bilbao’s central river, the Nervión, was extremely degraded to the extent that aquatic life could no longer survive in it. Although waterfront sites are generally a boon to real estate developers, the quality of the river was so poor that any development tended to face away from the river. Post-industrialization left Bilbao’s urban landscape abandoned and polluted.

The 1989 Revitalization Plan

As a response to Bilbao’s poor economy and degraded environment, the city used neoliberal economic and urban restructuring to develop a post-industrial economy based on cultural tourism, service sector jobs, and the technology sector. In the late 1980s, the city and provincial governments undertook a massive research and planning process led by the centrist nationalist party, Partido Nacional Vasco. In 1987, Bilbao began by hosting international conferences “to learn what [the city] could learn from design and management of programmes for the regeneration of other old industrial cities in Europe and North America.” From 1987 to 1989 Bilbao hosted three international conferences aimed at researching techniques that

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92 Ibid.
had transformed post-industrial cities: the II World Basque Conference in 1987, the Conference Bilbao in 1988 and Forum Bilbao on Urban Renewal in 1989. The influence of Glasgow’s waterfront renewal plan, that used a riverfront as a springboard for the development of a cultural district, emerged as a model for Bilbao. Bilbao’s early research phase led to the 1989 Plan General de Ordinación Urbana de Bilbao, which is alternately referred to as the Revitalization Plan, created by the Basque provincial government and the Bizakia City Council. Characterized by a neoliberal approach, the 1989 plan guided investments in the urban environment that would attract tourism and new development.

The 1989 plan entailed a total reorganization of Bilbao’s economy and urban space. The plan included six major goals and initiatives. Typical of comprehensive planning efforts, the 1989 plan acted as value statement or guiding document that would lead to later building projects and more specific plans. The first major tenet of the plan focused on investing in education in order to train more educated workers. Typical of a post-industrial situation and a neoliberal approach, the plan focused on the cultivation of service jobs and the de-emphasis on industrial jobs. Therefore, its second goal was to decrease Bilbao’s high unemployment by “shift[ing] the economy away from iron ore and metallurgy towards the service sector.” The plan recommended the construction of culture and leisure facilities, industrial diversification and the encouragement of foreign investment to transform Bilbao into

95 Johnson, Cultural Capitals: Revaluing the Arts, Remaking Urban Spaces, 123.
97 Johnson, Cultural Capitals: Revaluing the Arts, Remaking Urban Spaces, 123.
a post-industrial economy and urban center for services, finance, and tourism.  

Urban projects preferred by the city were ones that would attract tourism and by extension create service jobs, such as cultural and leisure facilities like the Guggenheim Bilbao. In addition to the construction of cultural facilities, the plan called for increased government sponsorship of culture, recommending increased cultural creativity and egalitarian access to cultural capital. A city’s use of culture as “a strategy and theme of urban redevelopment” is not uncommon. In the context of neoliberal urban planning, the government’s sponsorship of culture could attract tourists, and harness the economic power of arts institutions and cultural tourism. These recommendations acted as a primer for the city’s construction of the epitome of twenty-first century art facilities, the Guggenheim Bilbao. Another major goal of the plan was to enable all citizens to access the impacts of urban planning and new economic growth in Bilbao. Despite the 1989 plan’s neutral and inclusive rhetoric, the economic and urban situation it imagined benefitted tourists and the privileged, instead of all residents of Bilbao equally.

Equally important to the plan’s economic and urban reforms, the plan mounted a rebranding effort to reform Bilbao’s image as an unsafe, economically depressed post-industrial town. By branding Bilbao as a lively, cosmopolitan tourist destination, the Basques could attract more visitors and investors. The plan had a

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“clear objective—to change the image of the city of Bilbao.” As explored in the thesis introduction, branding efforts for urban reforms are characteristic of neoliberal urban planning. Paul Knox explains that Bilbao’s plan, “was implemented through a distinctively neoliberal mode of urban governance, concerned less with the distribution of goods and services within the city and more with investment in image-building processes in order to attract new economy jobs.”

Both the reality and the image of the new Bilbao was aimed at several distinct audiences. Local Basque residents were the first audience of these planning efforts. Confronting substantial out-migration as well as eroding political confidence, the leading political party, the PNV, positioned itself as a functional and efficient political party by embarking upon such a substantial project. Their ability to complete these projects after such a long period of political inaction demonstrated the party’s political power. To Basque audiences, therefore, these urban projects can be read as statements of the power and legitimacy of the PNV. In addition to the local Basque audience, major renovations in Bilbao were aimed at Spanish audiences as well. In the consistent Basque struggle for cultural autonomy, the emergence of Bilbao as an important cultural capital as opposed to conventional tourist destinations such as Madrid marked an important assertion of Basque identity. In light of the Basques’ portrayal as a “rustic and backward tourist attraction by the Spanish government, France and the rest of Europe,” Bilbao’s emergence as a cultural center was even more stunning. Therefore, the Basques’ use of cosmopolitan cultural facilities to

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103 Gonzalez, “Bilbo: Culture, Citizenship and Quality of Life,” 81.
launch urban regeneration suggests a rejection of Spanish and European stereotypes of Basques as uncultured. Most importantly, Bilbao’s new marketing campaign was aimed at international tourists. Bilbao’s size, location, and history of political violence had previously discouraged tourists from visiting, but through extensive branding, Bilbao hoped to join the ranks of Spanish and global tourist destinations.

In order to make its massive goals feasible, Bilbao relied on public-private partnerships to plan and fund major projects. Typical of neoliberal governance, these partnerships often help raise funds for public projects, bring entrepreneurial expertise to city government projects, but often have development-led agendas. The 1989 plan suggests that public-private partnerships allow flexibility that government entities may not be able to offer, noting that reforms could be carried out by “the existence of joint responsibilities and consortiums for the sectorial management of public services can be useful as a base on which to extend their advantages of specialty and flexibility. Another aspect to be considered is the existence of a private sector typified by a entrepreneurial spirit and awareness of the interests of the community.”

Public-private partnerships were integral to the planning process in Bilbao, beginning with the 1989 plan.

Bilbao Ría 2000 and Bilbao Metropoli-30 were the public-private partnerships that carried out the 1989 plan’s recommendations. Bilbao Ría 2000 is the entity responsible for planning urban regeneration efforts. It is a “non-profitmaking entity, the product of a cooperation commitment on the part of all public authorities in a

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common task to transform the metropolitan area of Bilbao.”\(^{107}\) While it is composed of some governmental officials, Bilbao Ría 2000 and its counterpart Bilbao Metropoli-30 are non-profits. Bilbao Ría 2000 was originally funded with 3,000,000 pesetas, and uses land valorization mechanisms to remain financially sufficient.\(^{108}\) By assuming control of both public and private land, and developing it, Bilbao Ría 2000 is able to recoup the gain in value of the land, therein gaining revenue. Bilbao Ría 2000’s process is similar to the extremely popular American process of Tax Increment Financing, wherein the city earmarks revenue from future increases in land value to be used for public projects. In Bilbao’s case, however, the public-private partnership controlled the land to be developed, unlike in American instances of TIF. The government directly funded some flagship projects, such as the Guggenheim Bilbao, but outside of the city’s original funding, Bilbao Ría 2000 is financially self-sufficient and enjoys considerable authority in determining, financing, and planning projects. The use of public-private partnerships in urban redevelopment schemes is a hallmark of neoliberal urbanism. Galder Guenaga et al. write that “the newly emerging regimes of governing urban revitalization involve the subordination of formal government structures to new institutions and agencies, often paralleled by a significant redistribution of policy-making powers, competencies and responsibilities.”\(^{109}\) While this model has been financially solvent and generally successful in Bilbao, Bilbao Ría


2000 and Bilbao Metropoli 30 are not transparent and accessible institutions, and can allow private interests to influence future development in Bilbao.

The 1989 Plan and Neoliberal Urban Interventions

In order to attract tourism, the plan recommended improved mobility and transportation in Bilbao in order to make the city a more accessible and navigable tourist destination. The plan capitalizes on Bilbao’s location near the Atlantic coast in between Spain and France. According to the plan, Bilbao’s, “competitive advantage compared with other European metropolises will be based on exploiting its fine geographic situation. This center will have railroad connections with Europe, the availability of a Port of great magnitude, multiple international connections and an Airport with a complete aerial offer,” to other European and global destinations. As part of the effort to become a tourist-destination, the city and provincial government funded multiple transit and infrastructural projects designed by internationally famous architects. The first to open was a new metro system, designed by Norman Foster, which opened in 1995. Bilbao’s use of standout architecture for transit continued an airport designed by Santiago Calatrava’s in 2000. Other infrastructural developments in the plan included relocating Bilbao’s port from the city center to the mouth of the Nervión in order to transfer remaining and unsightly industrial and transport functions on the river away from the city center.

Because of Bilbao’s derelict landscape, urban interventions were necessary for the city to join the ranks of other international tourist destinations. Characteristic of

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neoliberal urban planning, the plan emphasizes the use of flagship or standout buildings designed by famous architects as recognizable images of the city or certain areas of the city. The plan recommends the construction of, “Various emblematic buildings which would contribute to social and cultural centrality of the metropolis and to improving its external image and appeal.” Bilbao took an image-based approach to urban restructuring; supporting projects that would attract tourists and whose iconic reproductions could easily functions as advertisements for the city. Indeed, the plan notes the importance of their rehabilitated image for both Basque and international audiences. The plan notes that, “The success of urban regeneration in the Metropolitan Area of Bilbao constitutes a crucial factor of internal awareness and of a new external image,” suggesting the city’s interest in projects that would spur nearby development, while also functioning as icons or images of the new Bilbao. While the Guggenheim Bilbao is perhaps the most famous, it is only one of many megaprojects by famous architects that would remake the city into a global tourist destination.

Because a significant portion of Bilbao’s central land area remained abandoned, the plan recommended developing underutilized areas, with particular focus on waterfront and industrial sites. According to the plan, the Nervión was to become “an estuary that constitutes the vertebral axis and integrated element of the metropolis,” that could function as a springboard for culture and public interaction. The Revitalization Plan also labeled abandoned industrial sites as potential locations for development, including Abandoibarra where the Guggenheim

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
Bilbao would later be sited (Figure 3.3). The plan recommended the “recover[y] of damaged urban infrastructure through the exploitation of obsolete or abandoned spaces and the rehabilitation of the old town.”

Developments in abandoned areas that were both privately and publicly owned would be lucrative because land values would be low and would yield high returns. These projects could also capitalize on the symbolic potential of the city’s industrial past. Re-imagined industrial projects are common in neoliberal urban redevelopment, such as the use of industrial lofts as real estate or projects that reuse obsolete infrastructure such as the High Line.

The district in which the Guggenheim Bilbao would be located, Abandoibarra, is centrally located, bordered by Casco Viejo (Old Town) on the south and the Nervión on its north. The district had been neglected during post-industrialization. Empty shipping containers sat on deserted lots and the Nervión was virtually inaccessible to the public. Due to remaining industrial infrastructure, Abandoibarra was cut off from the surrounding residential areas. However, its location was especially appealing to developers because it was, “situated strategically on the edge of the 19th century expansion of the city, one of the highest income neighborhoods.”

While Abandoibarra was under-developed, its surrounding neighborhoods were not, making it easier to draw spending into the district and raise existing real estate prices in the neighborhoods surrounding the waterfront district. Abandoibarra’s location was ideal for redevelopment because it was largely

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113 Bollens, *Intervening in Politically Turbulent Cities: Spaces, Buildings, and Boundaries*, 89.
abandoned, had riverfront views, and was located near historic and wealthy neighborhoods, but it also had a symbolic connection to Bilbao’s industrial past. Louise Johnson writes that many of the developments in Abandoibarra were sited at “the abandoned industrial plants on which the early wealth of the city had been built.”\textsuperscript{117} The creation of a new cultural district at one of the sites of Bilbao’s industrial past therefore had a symbolic dimension, signifying the Basque return to prominence with an economy based on tourism and services.

Although Bilbao’s planning efforts were highly successful at re-making Bilbao as a sparkling tourist destination, critics have noted that the city’s urban policy has had inequitable benefits. For example, while service sector employment has increased, these jobs are often informal, short in duration, and carry fewer benefits than an industrial job would have.\textsuperscript{118} Galder Guenaga et al. point out that Bilbao’s priority in redeveloping central locations, like Abandoibarra, exacerbates economic and social problems in peripheral locations. They write that, “downtown regeneration proceeds along continuing unemployment, widespread poverty, and environmental degradation in its surrounding area.”\textsuperscript{119} Last, Bilbao’s neoliberal urban policy has been criticized for rendering the city’s center for becoming privatized and less accessible. While Bilbao’s new cultural facilities, airports, and footbridges are easily accessible to tourists and the privileged, they are less so for average and low-income residents of Bilbao who typically live on the opposite side of the Nervión. Lorenzo Vicario sums up the state of central Bilbao by commenting that, “the new emblematic

\textsuperscript{117} Johnson, \textit{Cultural Capitals: Revaluing the Arts, Remaking Urban Spaces}, 138.


\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
projects with their combination of luxury housing, commercial and leisure spaces, new associated city image and consequent evolution of the real estate market are all enabling the city’s central district—an already privileged area—to become ever more exclusive and “privatized.”

While Bilbao’s economic and urban situation have changed drastically since planning began, in many ways for the better, the nature of neoliberal urban development in Bilbao has facilitated economic inequality and rendered the center of the city in particular a privatized playground for tourists rather than an accessible cultural center for the city’s public broadly conceived.

A discussion of Bilbao’s urban planning efforts in the late 1980s makes it apparent that the Guggenheim Bilbao was just one of many megaprojects that the city used to regenerate its economy. While these reforms were comprehensive and wide ranging, most were aimed at elevating its international status in order to draw tourism. However, media and art historical accounts tend to attribute Bilbao’s rise as such solely to the museum. Unearthing the urban program of the Basques in addition to the conventionally cited voices of Thomas Krens and Frank Gehry leads to a more complete understanding of the redevelopment in Abandoibarra and the Guggenheim Bilbao’s role in this process. However, it was Frank Gehry who proposed that the site for the Guggenheim Bilbao be located within Abandoibarra, on a prominent bend of the Nervión, suggesting the layered process of actors and influences on the urban regeneration of Bilbao and Abandoibarra.


Abandoibarra was marked as an “opportunity site” in the 1989 Plan, but planning and construction in the district didn’t occur until after the agreement with the Guggenheim Foundation. In 1992, one year after the agreement, Bilbao’s City Council and Bilbao Metropoli-30 hosted a competition to design a master plan for Abandoibarra. The guidelines for the competition required “mixed-use development and recognition of the site’s emblematic function.”\(^{121}\) The first round of the competition was open to local architects, the winners of which joined three international firms for the next round of the selection process. Bilbao’s interest in cultivating an impressive image is apparent in its desire for well-known international architects that would bring prestige and notoriety to their projects, instead of local architects. Furthermore, the influence of the Revitalization Plan is apparent in these guidelines, harking back to the desire for “emblematic buildings.” In 1993, the American firm Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects was selected to design the overall site plan. Balmori Associates was selected to tend to landscape and transit design. Aguinaga and Associates was selected as the local consulting firm. Construction on Pelli’s plan began in 1998, after the opening of the Guggenheim Museum, and continued until 2012.\(^{122}\)

Pelli’s master plan extends the urban grid of the city center into Abandoibarra, through two orthogonal streets that extend to the riverfront (Figure 1.2). A new curved avenue along the Nervión ties the Opera Building or Teatro

\(^{122}\) I think it is worth suggesting that this timeline coincides almost identically with the construction and opening of the Guggenheim Bilbao, 1991-1997. While Bilbao planned urban interventions in Abandoibarra in the early stages of planning and construction of the museum, it is likely that the city waited to implement the urban plans until they saw some success, and some revenue, from the GMB. In this way, the Guggenheim Bilbao was necessary to the realization of these plans, even though they existed early in its development.
Arriaga, designed by Joaquín Rucoba in 1890, to the Guggenheim Museum as bookends of the districts, and reorganizes the traffic system. Balmori’s contribution is two-thirds green space, consisting of three enlarged or new parks, acting as a “huge inhabitable lung for the city.” The plan integrates pedestrian access, mass transit, and roadways with the creation of green, public space, reconnecting Abandoibarra to the rest of Bilbao and making it an ideal area for pedestrian tourists.

In addition to the urban plans for the district, numerous buildings and infrastructural projects were constructed in the area. While not all of these projects were publically funded, the types of projects constructed suggest Bilbao’s interest in facilitating tourism, business and investment. In addition to the Guggenheim Bilbao, the following have been built in Abandoibarra since 1989: Music and Conference Auditorium, Federico Soriano and Dolores Palacios, 1994-1999; University de Duesto Library, Rafael Moneo, 2006-2008; Iberdola Tower, Cesar Pelli, 2007-2011; Zubizuri Bridge, Santiago Calatrava, 1997; Father Arrupe Footbridge, José Antonio Fernández Ordóñez, 2004; Sheraton Hotel, Ricardo Legorreta, 2004; Zubiarte Shopping Center, Robert AM Stern, 2004. The influence of the 1989 plan is apparent in even a glance at this list of projects in Abandoibarra. Perhaps exceeding expectations of the 1989 plan, Abandoibarra and Bilbao has become home to hotels, shopping malls, world-class cultural institutions, and a network of pedestrian access points for all of these sites. Both preceding and galvanized by the Guggenheim Bilbao, the careful planning and explosion of building in Abandoibarra has rendered the once abandoned industrial site a lively, landscaped cultural district.

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Public Space in Abandoibarra

Typical of neoliberal urban redevelopment schemes, a considerable portion of the redeveloped Abandoibarra is public space. Diana Balmori’s plan “weaves new development into the historic old city with particular emphasis on expanding the amount of textured green space and incorporating sustainable design practices.” In addition to considering the historical urban landscape of Casco Viejo and nearby residential neighborhoods, Balmori’s plans attempt to further integrate the Nervión into Bilbao’s landscape. Balmori explains that, “The aim of the entire design was to interlace the river and the old city with the new piece of urban land from the old port.” Structured around key building projects such as the Guggenheim Museum, the Iberdola Tower by Pelli, and the Concert Hall, these plans integrate previously disparate parts of Bilbao’s built environment and the new buildings that were a product of planning in Abandoibarra.

The Pelli and Balmori plans facilitate both pedestrian and car circulation throughout Abandoibarra. The new Abandoibarra is two-thirds green space and there is relatively little parking, suggesting that the pedestrian has the most autonomy in the district. However, the question of the automobile figures prominently into the plans. Because of this, many pedestrian walkways are bookends of vehicular streets. Because Abandoibarra had been previously occupied by industrial uses, it did not have a conventional street system, so Pelli and Balmori had considerable authority in laying out its new street grid. Still, the planners had to consider connections to La

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Salve and Deustuko Bridges as well as the existing grid of Casco Viejo. To resolve these issues, Pelli created two orthogonal boulevards, Rumon Rubia Kalea, which terminates at the east-west boulevard, and Leizaola Lehendakairea Kalea, which connects to the Deustuko Bridge (Figure 1.3). Pelli also placed a new curved avenue along the Nervión, between the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Opera House. Traffic and access to Abandoibarra is resolved by the traffic circle surrounding Euskadi Plaza (Figure 1.4). This circular plaza, designed by Balmori and Associates, reveals the co-mingling of the automobile and the pedestrian in Abandoibarra. The light stone-clad pathway in the center of the plaza directly connects the Doña Casilda Park and the Museum of Fine Arts with a pedestrian approach towards the river. Sidewalks flanking Ramon Rubia Street meet with the east-west pedestrian pathways along the street and terminate at the Father Arrupe Footbridge. Mass transit is brought to Abandoibarra via tramlines that are nestled within separate lanes of traffic that are then flanked by sidewalks (Figure 1.5). Within the green space of Campa de los Ingleses Park, more curving pedestrian corridors move towards the river. While Abandoibarra is mostly green space, the close placement of pedestrian and automobile pathways makes the district friendly to both.

The regeneration project focused on redeveloping and creating four parks within Abandoibarra, including the Doña Casilda Park, Campa de los Igleses Park, Euskadi Circle and the Parque de la Ribera (Figure 1.6). Balmori’s plan extended the Doña Casilda Park, a historic nineteenth century park near the Museum of Fine Arts, connecting it to pedestrian approaches towards Abandoibarra. Terracing as well as

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sloping pathways in Campa de los Ingleses Park connect disparate parts of the landscape and counteract the high slope of the district (Figure 1.7). The Parque de la Ribera (River Park) is a landscaped area along the Nervión that occupies two parallel planes (Figure 1.8). Massive metal piers mark the space along the river, suggesting Abandoibarra’s industrial past. These public green spaces in Abandoibarra provide places for pedestrians, tourists, and residents to enjoy the new landscape of Bilbao, and provide unification between the historic sections of the city, the city’s new cultural and commercial facilities, and the Nervión.

The Guggenheim Bilbao

As this chapter has detailed, the Basque provincial government and Bilbao’s City Council led a substantial regeneration effort entailing comprehensive urban renovations independently of plans to build a Guggenheim in Bilbao. I argue that understanding these urban planning efforts are essential for study of the Guggenheim Bilbao as an art museum and a force of urban development. This section of the chapter will chronicle the history of the decision to build a Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao as it relates to the context of urban planning in Bilbao. Then, I will provide a short history of the siting of the Guggenheim and its relationship to its quickly changing urban landscape. Last, I will discuss the varying concepts of public of space on the part of the Guggenheim Foundation, Frank Gehry, and the Basques, that are expressed in the urban space around the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

While the Guggenheim Foundation enjoyed international prestige as a world-class art museum, its financial situation was precarious in the late 1980s. Its president Thomas Krens was known to be a shrewd and enterprising director who was famous
for leading the transformation of an abandoned factory building into the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. He was also known for using unconventional tactics to raise money for the Guggenheim Foundation, such as de-accessioning three famous pieces, presumably in order to pay for renovations and expansions to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim. Of these strategies, the most radical and innovative was his idea to build satellite museums of the Guggenheim throughout the world. In so doing, more of the prestigious Guggenheim collection could be on display at any one time and the foundation would receive more revenue from ticket sales from its “franchises.”

By 1990, Krens was searching for an ideal location for the first international Guggenheim. Designs for a Guggenheim in Salzburg, Austria had been drawn up by Hans Hollein, but were abandoned due to a loss of funding.

In light of this, the decision to build a Guggenheim in Bilbao is surprising. More conventional tourist destinations, such as Salzburg, were in the running to be the home of a Guggenheim Museum. Bilbao’s out-of-the-way location, unappealing architecture, eroded economy, and history of terrorism made Bilbao one of the last locations one would expect the Guggenheim Foundation to choose. It is clear now that Bilbao’s surprising location was actually a boon to the Guggenheim’s success in Bilbao, however; it highlights the importance of Bilbao’s neoliberal restructuring. Arguably, without the huge Basque commitments to urban renovations, including the construction of the metro system and a new airport, Bilbao would not have been

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considered as a viable location for a large investment from the Guggenheim Foundation.

After funding dried up for the Salzburg Guggenheim project, Krens continued searching for a European location for a Guggenheim franchise. Carmen Gimenez, curator of twentieth century art at the Guggenheim Foundation, had previously been the Director of National Exhibitions for the Spanish government, and she suggested Spain as a possible location. After being turned down by cities including Barcelona, Seville, Badajoz and the bank Santander, Krens agreed to meet with representatives of the Basque government. He visited Bilbao in early 1991, and an agreement between the Basques and the Guggenheim Foundation was signed in October 1991. Information about negotiations between the Basques and the Guggenheim was very secretive. Various Basque and non-Basque scholars including Joseba Zulaika have criticized the agreement because it is perceived to have favored the Guggenheim Foundation. Donald McNeill explains that there is an “overriding concern that the Basques were weaker partners in the negotiation process.” The agreement specified that the Basques would cover construction costs, create an acquisitions fund, pay a fee to the Guggenheim, and agree to subsidize the museum’s annual budget, adding up to an $182 million investment. Krens is known to be a shrewd negotiator. He made

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129 Ibid.
130 Sources are unclear whether Krens or Basques contacted each other first. It is certain that Bilbao was not Krens’ first choice, and that he didn’t think the Basques would have enough money to pay the Guggenheim Foundation.
comments that he “seduced” the Basques into the agreement. Although it may appear the Krens and the Guggenheim Foundation had a more powerful position in the negotiation process, the Basques were not clueless about the benefits of having a Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The Guggenheim could become a cornerstone of their well-researched plan of urban regeneration. Additionally, the perks of having a world-class arts institution in a place perceived as “backwards” greatly appealed to the Basques. The agreement was passed with considerable amendments favoring the Basques including, “restriction on Guggenheim expansion in Europe without the prior consent of the Basques, and the requirement that the Foundation provide at least three exhibitions per year of equal merit to those being staged in New York.”

In July 1991, Frank Gehry was selected as the architect although he had previously played a role in choosing the site of the museum as a consultant during the agreement process. In 1997, the museum opened to favorable reviews and Bilbao began to see more tourists each day, establishing the origins of the mythic Bilbao Effect.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and Urban Landscape

Under-researched accounts of the “Bilbao Effect” and Frank Gehry’s style tend to occupy most art historical writing about the Guggenheim Bilbao. However, the building has an equally profound and deft relationship to its urban landscape as its impressive swirling, titanium-clad forms. Indeed, Gehry’s comments below suggest the contextual nature of his designs for the museum.

134 Ana Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika, Learning from the Guggenheim Bilbao (Reno: University of Nevada, 2005), 152.
135 Johnson, Cultural Capitals: Revaluing the Arts, Remaking Urban Spaces, 135.
“There’s a river, there’s a huge bridge. There’s a nineteenth century city, and it’s at a higher level than the river. The city has a green valley surrounding all this, which makes it all kind of palatable. I was fascinated with the big bridge and the dynamics of the city, which was vibrant in terms of traffic, energy, and everything going on…I had so many elements to resolve: how to make a connection to a nineteenth-century city, how to bring people down to the river’s edge, how to engage the bridge, how to deal with the Basque culture, their interests, their roots.”

This section provides a new examination of the museum’s relationship to its urban context, revealing its connection to both its physical context and prior Basque planning.

As part of pre-existing urban regeneration efforts, the Basques had planned to renovate an existing structure located in the historical district of Bilbao, which would become a contemporary art museum. Jorge Oteiza, a local Basque architect and artist, had drawn up plans to build a glass cube on top of a historical wine cellar, which was “to house a large cultural center… as a symbol of the new Bilbao.” The Guggenheim Museum offered a better alternative for the Basques, and this plan was scrapped, suggesting the international rather than local intentions of the 1989 Plan. Upon seeing the building, both Krens and Gehry felt that its spaces were not large enough to facilitate art display, and began considering other locations for a museum. Gehry proposed the bend on the river Nervión as the potential site for the Guggenheim because the Basques were continually referencing their intentions to redevelop the waterfront as part of pre-existing planning efforts. Gehry commented that, “I went past the Bellas Artes Museum and then crossed this bridge to the university—and the museum is now located right here. I ran down to the opera house

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137 Santamaría, The Alleged Bilbao Miracle and Its Discontents, 38
and then back to the Bellas Artes Museum and then I realized that this was, in fact, what I called the geo-cultural triangle of Bilbao.” Gehry chose the site in order to link to other cultural institutions in the city, such as the Fine Arts Museum and the Opera House. Additionally, the industrial quality of Abandoibarra and its highly visible location on the bend of the Nervión figured into the siting decision for the museum. The choice to site the Guggenheim Bilbao in Abandoibarra reveals the interrelated nature of Basque urban planning and the design of the museum. Basque planning affected Gehry’s siting of the Guggenheim Bilbao, but in turn, the museum pushed planning priorities away from Casco Viejo into Abandoibarra.

The Guggenheim Bilbao’s unique style is derived from its industrial setting. The museum is sited at an abandoned industrial location, El Campo de los Ingleses Steel Works, symbolizing Bilbao’s industrial past. Its titanium cladding commemorates the height of industrial production and metallurgy in Bilbao. Like the 1989 plan’s reclamation of industrial spaces, the museum’s occupation of a previously industrial site connects to Bilbao’s past as a center of industrial production. The museum’s placement on a site associated with times of prosperity, also suggests the bright future of Bilbao as a cosmopolitan tourist destination with sparkling new buildings in the latest style.

The Guggenheim Bilbao connects urbanistically and stylistically to the Nervión. In siting the museum at the riverfront rather than in the city center, Gehry asserted that he believed the river could become the “geocultural center of the

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138 Ibid.
The museum’s site takes advantage of the prominent bend of the river to afford optimal views of the Guggenheim from other symbolic locations, including the City Hall Bridge (Figure 1.9). While the 1989 Plan pointed to the river as an opportunity site, the Guggenheim’s siting certainly brought more planning and activity to the riverfront. The removal of shipping containers and industrial facilities, and the creation of public space at and around the river at the Guggenheim opened up a significant portion of the Nervión for the public to enjoy. The museum’s style is also considered in relation to the river. The bending titanium of the façade is often thought to be nautically inspired. The Guggenheim is beautifully reflected in the water of the river and the water gardens on the south side of the museum provide continuity with the river.

The difference in elevation between the riverfront and the city center made connecting the museum to the city center difficult. The slope was resolved by building the ground floor of the museum at the level of the river, and building the first floor of the museum at the level of the city center (Figure 1.10). The outdoor limestone plaza on the first floor level of the building connects to the streetscape of the city center, built above the ground level of Abandoibarra. Pedestrians access the museum via Ipaarraguirre Street, which connects to the outdoor plaza. Pedestrians are drawn towards the museum by the striking view of the Guggenheim’s non-Euclidean forms juxtaposed with the rectilinear neoclassical buildings of Casco Viejo. The descending staircases on the west side of the museum connect the exterior space of the museum to the level of the river, encouraging pedestrians to walk downwards to the river.

van Bruggen, Frank O. Gehry: Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 22.
The museum building’s occupation of two ground levels, allowed Gehry to accommodate mass transit and vehicular movement. The ground level of the museum has a short tunnel, covered by the plaza section of the first floor level, for tramlines and a street corridor that pass through the space of the museum (Figure 1.11). Gehry hid this infrastructure underneath the museum, while maximizing space for the museum, by building around the infrastructure. The ground floor is also home to a small, open parking lot for museum employees, which is mostly invisible to the public, hidden on the east side by the La Salve Bridge and obscured on the west by the museum. The pedestrian space at the first floor level of the museum is much more visible than spaces for cars and trams on the ground floor level of the Guggenheim. The relegation of the car and tramlines suggest that pedestrian tourists are the ideal user of these spaces.

The most apparent automobile travel near the Guggenheim Bilbao is on La Salve Bridge. La Salve Bridge, an incline suspension bridge, was built in the 1970s to “connect the heart of the city to the suburbs,” to its north.\(^\text{141}\) While Gehry chose to hide the street and tramlines underneath the museum, he chose to make the museum’s relationship to the bridge apparent. The Guggenheim stretches under and around the bridge, wrapping into the infrastructure of the city. Designed by Gehry, the empty tower on the east side of the museum marks the Guggenheim’s presence on the east side of the bridge. The tower’s metal scaffolding is reminiscent of the materials of the bridge. The tower volume is approachable on the ground level, containing stairs that connect to pedestrian pathways on the east side of the bridge. A

long arm of the western pedestrian portion of the bridge terminates in front of the plaza, making either pedestrian side of La Salve Bridge accessible from the museum. Automobiles traveling on the bridge are afforded a view of the museum, but exit the bridge in Casco Viejo, rather than Abandoibarra. The museum’s complex interweaving with the La Salve Bridge continues the preference for pedestrian travel, while highlighting existing industrial-era infrastructure in Bilbao.

The landscape of Abandoibarra has changed drastically since the Guggenheim Bilbao was built. When it was built, shipping containers and empty lots surrounded the museum. Since then, Pelli and Balmori’s plans have sculpted and beautified the area. Now, the museum’s titanium cladding is one of the only signifiers of Bilbao’s industrial past because the surrounding areas have been redeveloped. The building can now be interpreted as the triumph of Bilbao’s new economy, rather than a hopeful sign of progress. The Guggenheim Bilbao was profoundly affected by its urban landscape, but that landscape has changed over time. The next section of this paper will consider public space at the Guggenheim Bilbao with respect to its conceptions by the Guggenheim Foundation, Frank Gehry, and the Basques.

**Public Space at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao**

As previously mentioned, the Guggenheim Bilbao is not typically considered in art historical literature for its relationship to urban landscape, despite its careful response to natural and architectural features of Bilbao. In particular, the public space surrounding the Guggenheim Bilbao is frequently ignored in descriptions and photographic representations of the site. However, there is substantial public space
surrounding the museum Gehry connected to existing infrastructure and that later planning responded to. This public space has received additions and revisions over time, with the expansions of parks and green spaces, directly bordering the Guggenheim Bilbao, stemming from the Pelli and Balmori planning initiatives that were designed and constructed from 1992 to 1998. I will give a summary of the public space at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao as affected and shaped by the distinct voices of Gehry, the Basques and its hired architects, and the Guggenheim Foundation and its connections to newer public spaces.

While Gehry’s architectural style preoccupies writing about the Guggenheim Bilbao, Gehry was concerned with public space from the beginning of the project. Coosje van Bruggen explains that in planning the museum Gehry “thought of a spacious public area, a water garden, and a private counterpart—the museum—reachable by ramp.”142 Van Bruggen’s summary suggests that public space was an integral part of Gehry’s designs for the project. His published designs for the Guggenheim Bilbao include references to public space, with marked designations for “plazas” clad in “stone pavers” (Figure 1.10). Plaza spaces are clad in the same limestone as the rectilinear forms of the building, demarcating the space near the museum. The portion of the plan closest to the river is marked “promenade,” suggesting Gehry’s intention to create a public space that allowed visitors to walk along the river. The Guggenheim’s public space stretches from the street, Mazarredo Zumarkalea, to the river, expanding outwards alongside the museum building towards the river. Pedestrians have two options for movement upon approaching the

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142 van Bruggen, Frank O. Gehry: Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 31.
museum; they can take one of two sets of stairs downwards to either the entrance of the museum or the promenade at the river. The elevated and curving promenade around the river allows pedestrians to cross underneath the La Salve Bridge or use a staircase within the tower structure to access pedestrian portions of the bridge (Figure 1.12, 1.13). The promenade affords visitors views of the river, the cityscape on the opposing side of the Nervión as well as the curving forms of the museum. Gehry’s material choices on the northern and southern ends of the building and its respective public space, provides continuity with its bordering landscape. His use of stone cladding for the plaza spaces, reminding of cobblestones, connects to the conventional streetscape and neoclassical residential buildings of Casco Viejo. On the southern end of the site, the placement of a water garden facing the river provides continuity with the river. Gehry’s designs for the space around the Guggenheim carefully consider its relationship with pedestrian approaches, transit infrastructure, as well as the language of the surrounding landscape. Visitors, especially tourists, use these public spaces to take photos, appreciate views of the city, the museum and the river, and relax.

**Public Sculpture at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao**

While Gehry most directly influenced the built structure of this space, the Guggenheim Foundation and museum employees, have affected its reception and use by installing a public sculpture program. While it is relatively apparent that the building is a museum due to its contemporary style and its notoriety, these truly monumental sculptures reinforce the Guggenheim’s overwhelming message that it is a center for arts and culture. Additionally, much like the Guggenheim Bilbao itself, its public sculpture program functions as easily digestible and reproducible icons of the
museum and Bilbao. Sited at picturesque and well-traversed locations, the sculptures, _Puppy_ by Jeff Koons, _Maman_ by Louise Bourgeois, and _Tall Tree & The Eye_ by Anish Kapoor, complement the sculptural exterior of the museum (Figures 1.14, 1.15, 1.16). The works are sited at highly visible, and photographable, locations at the museum. _Puppy_ is sited in the public plaza in front of the entrance of the museum, across from Mazarredo Zumarkalea Street. It is visible upon approach to the museum if one is walking from Iparraguirre Kalea Street, the most popular paths to the museum. _Maman_ is located on the river promenade, while _Tall Tree & The Eye_, a more recent installation, is sited on an above-water portion of the water garden. The sculptures are both visible from the opposite side of the river. The highly visible siting and monumental forms of the sculptures attracts pedestrians and visitors to the museum, and shares some of the Guggenheim’s collection with the public, but the sculpture has another equally important role in disseminating the image of the Guggenheim Museum to potential travelers and the world abroad. Jennifer A. Henning explains that,

The inclusion of signature public art such as Jeff Koons’ _Puppy_, and Louise Bourgeois’ _Maman_, that could be used as branding images, gave the media iconic images to repetitively use... Co-branding between Bilbao, the Guggenheim Foundation, and Frank Gehry yielded a sculptural enigmatic architectural icon that was reinforced by the indelible public art images of Koons’ _Puppy_ and Bourgeois’ _Maman_ every time Bilbao was addressed. These two public art installations became part of the media campaigns that helped lure attention and tourism to Bilbao...143

As Henning points out, the Guggenheim Bilbao’s sculptural program is equally an expression of the Guggenheim brand as the building is. Furthermore, the easily reproducible images of the sculptures project the new cosmopolitan Bilbao to the world. Indeed, the sculptors: Jeff Koons, Anish Kapoor, and Louise Bourgeois, are leading global art figures not unlike Frank Gehry in the architectural world. The Guggenheim Bilbao’s sculptural program offers the public a glimpse of the art within, but it also hints at the global power of the Guggenheim Foundation.

**New Public Spaces in Abandoibarra**

When the museum was built, its western edge was surrounded by shipping containers, but subsequent urban planning in Abandoibarra expanded public spaces near the Guggenheim Bilbao to include an extended river walk and the Campa de los Ingleses Park. The Campa de los Ingleses Park, designed by Diana Balmori, expands the public space from Gehry’s limestone clad plaza further into Abandoibarra. Constructed of sloping and undulating steppes much like forms of the museum, the park integrates Gehry’s limestone-clad public spaces with the rest of the district. Unlike the harsh space surrounding the Guggenheim, the park is a grassy and lush. Cafes and other amenities are nestled into the terraces, offering more recreation opportunities for people to the area that might not want to visit the museum specifically. The landscaped river walk continues the promenade that Gehry designed down the coast of the river throughout Abandoibarra, allowing pedestrians to walk down the length of the district on the waterfront. While Gehry was not involved in the plans for the larger public spaces connecting to the Guggenheim, Balmori and other architects extended some of his designs for public space into Abandoibarra.
The iconic status of the Guggenheim Bilbao eclipsed the urban planning that gave rise to it, becoming the sole symbol of Bilbao and its international ascendancy as a cosmopolitan tourist destination. However, as this chapter has pointed out, Bilbao’s mythic rise has not been as ideal as it has been portrayed in narratives of the Bilbao Effect. While the Guggenheim Bilbao and the new parks, commercial centers, and amenities in Abandoibarra are ostensibly public, Vicario’s characterization of the increasing privatization of the heart of Bilbao is persuasive. While Abandoibarra’s immortalization of Bilbao’s industrial past can be read as celebration of Basque pride, its location is one frequented by tourists, more often than residents. Bilbao’s symbolic past and its present revitalized incarnation have become a tourist attractions for wealthy museumgoers to consume for a few days on their way to Paris or Madrid, while Basque residents watch from across the river. Despite its reductive nature, the narrative of the Bilbao Effect has remained pervasive in urban planning and museum building even in the United States. The next three chapters of this thesis examine Daniel Libeskind’s Denver Art Museum as a product of the proliferation of the Bilbao Effect, as well as neoliberal urban planning that was much like Bilbao’s.
Chapter 2
Downtown Development in Denver:

As examined in the previous chapter, neoliberal urban planning efforts influenced the Guggenheim Bilbao’s physical form and its larger role in revitalizing the district of Abandoibarra. Daniel Libeskind’s addition to the Denver Art Museum (1999-2006) is widely considered to be modeled after the Guggenheim Bilbao. The conventional narrative of the decision to build a museum addition in Denver starts in Bilbao. In 1997, the DAM’s director, Lewis Sharp, attended the museum’s opening and was awestruck. Recounting his experience in Bilbao to the New York Times after the opening of the Hamilton Addition, he remarked that, “We wanted an architect that would create a building like that for us.”

Working with the model of the Guggenheim Bilbao in mind, the DAM and city leaders attempted to reproduce the Bilbao Effect in Denver. However, Denver’s urban policy was also experiencing a neoliberal turn. Much like Bilbao’s expansive urban planning efforts, the city of Denver set a development-based urban agenda that would help bring investment, tourists, and potential residents to the city. In particular, the city focused on encouraging residential development in its downtown, especially in the neighborhood that bordered the Denver Art Museum. Although it appears that the city officials in Denver were not aware of the Basque urban planning efforts, the similarities between the two projects are striking. The international rise of

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neoliberalism led to similar projects that leveraged the use of a flagship cultural facility to raise property values and encourage development in adjacent districts.

This chapter provides a chronology of neoliberal urban planning in Denver that I argue influenced the desire to build a Bilbao-type museum addition. The first section of this chapter will focus on the 1989 Comprehensive Plan, the 1989 Arts and Culture Plan, and the 1996 Downtown Agenda. These plans establish Denver’s neoliberal agenda that used the construction of arts and cultural facilities as a means for economic development in order to attract residential development to Denver’s downtown. The next section will focus more specifically on plans and building efforts in the areas surrounding the Hamilton Addition, the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle throughout the 1990s, concluding with the 1998 Golden Triangle Plan. The first section of this chapter examines the larger neoliberal municipal context that led to the decision to build a museum addition inspired by the Guggenheim Bilbao, while the second section of this chapter examines the specific planning recommendations for the Civic Center and Golden Triangle that influenced the built form of the museum addition.

The 1989 Comprehensive Plan

After a period of economic downtown in Colorado throughout the 1980s, Denver’s mayor Federico Peña (1983-1991) led efforts to draft a Comprehensive Plan for Denver that would address the city’s lagging economy.145 Drafted by Peña, the Denver Planning Board, and the Department of Planning and Development, the

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145 While the 1980s were prosperous times for the rest of the United States, Colorado experienced two recessions in 1982 and 1984-1987.
1989 Comprehensive Plan served as a framework for municipal actions until the next Comprehensive Plan was written in 2000. With Denver’s stagnant economy in mind, the plan’s first goal was to “stimulate the economy.” Long-term goals for the city included education reforms, new transportation infrastructure, and confronting air pollution. Most initiatives in the plan were pitched at aiding economic development, especially investments in the urban environment. In addition to structural reforms, the consideration of Denver’s identity as a city was also addressed in the plan, as it asked, “What do we really want this city to be, and to become?” Denver’s identity was a vital consideration for this plan and subsequent building projects in the city, as an attempt to leverage local culture as an attraction for investment and tourism.

**Urban Reforms in the 1989 Comprehensive Plan**

To some extent, the 1989 Comprehensive Plan treated the urban environment as an opportunity for economic investment and development. Focusing on Denver’s urban landscape, two of the core goals of the Comprehensive Plan were to “Beautify the city and preserve its history” and “Protect, enhance and integrate a city of neighborhoods,” which were malleable enough statements to facilitate both neoliberal and more redistributive urban policy. Indeed, Peña’s tenure as mayor exhibited some qualities of neoliberal urbanism, such as the beginning of construction of megaprojects like the Denver International Airport (1989-1995) and Coors Field (1990-1995). However, much of Peña’s urban policy focused on local neighborhood-

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147 Ibid, i.  
148 Ibid, 2.2.
level reforms and revitalization efforts. Susan Clarke explains that, “Mayor Peña’s 1983 election raised the visibility of neighborhood distress and ensured that CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds targeted neighborhood revitalization, creating a distinctive pattern of neighborhood policymaking centered on the allocation of federal resources.” Furthermore, as the first Hispanic mayor in Denver, Peña and his administration were known for offering new opportunities for neighborhoods, especially low-income and minority neighborhoods, to be actively involved in municipal planning processes. In service of neighborhood revitalization, the plan calls for the preservation of neighborhoods and their distinctive qualities, including unique architecture and demographics of residents. According to the vision of the 1989 Plan, Denver would become a thriving city of unique neighborhoods, with perceptible differences in architecture and culture from neighborhood to neighborhood.

However, the 1989 Comprehensive Plan linked the aesthetics of the city to its potential for development, noting that, “Good urban design enhances Denver’s distinctiveness, and that has ramifications for the city’s attractiveness as a place to live and its attractiveness for business and tourists.” Focusing on locations that were underused and centrally located, the plan marked the Golden Triangle as one of several neighborhoods prioritized for redevelopment efforts. Located directly south of the Denver Art Museum, the Golden Triangle was strategically located in Denver’s downtown close to the central business district and cultural and civic amenities of the

Civic Center Cultural Complex (Figure 2.1). The Golden Triangle was underused with a significant portion of its area occupied by parking lots. In order to redevelop the Golden Triangle, the plan recommended the following: “Encourage mixed-use development, create a role for the area or reinforce emerging identity, make a concentrated effort to build new housing, reinforce activity areas, improve neighborhood aesthetics, and increase parks and recreation opportunities.”

Although Peña’s urban policies were sensitive to neighborhoods, the priorities of these plans closely follow the rubric of neoliberal urban policy, which would be pursued more aggressively by later mayoral administrations. In addition to its focus on neighborhoods, the plan recommends the preservation and creation of public spaces. For example, the plan makes note of the public resources of civic architecture and public space in Civic Center Park. Stemming from the 1989 plan, Denver’s interest in redeveloping its built environment, civic spaces, and the Golden Triangle, marked the beginning of a trend of downtown development that paved the way for large urban megaprojects such as the Hamilton Addition.

**Arts & Culture in the 1989 Comprehensive and Cultural Plans**

Another major goal of the 1989 Comprehensive Plan’s was to “Celebrate the city’s arts, culture and ethnic diversity.” Alongside the use of urban policy to aid economic development was the use of “cultural activities” as “major economic stimulators.” The city’s patronage of arts and culture was aimed at attracting

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152 Ibid, 5.55.
153 Ibid, 4.5.
154 Ibid, 14.11.
tourists and potential residents to Denver in order “to establish Denver as the cultural and leisure capital of the Rocky Mountain West.”\textsuperscript{155} Although Denver was considered the recreational capital of its region in large part due to its proximity to the Rockies, the city wanted to encourage tourists to spend more time in Denver rather than using it as a stop along the way to the mountains. Cultural policy was such a high priority, that the city drafted another plan specifically for arts and culture later that year. Led by the Commission on Cultural Affairs, \textit{Cultural Denver: An Action Plan for the Development of the Cultural Environment of the City and County of Denver} was published in August 1989. Aimed at developing a flourishing art scene (and harnessing its economic benefits), the Cultural Plan promoted an increase in funding for the arts, communication between private and municipal arts organization, adding arts education to public school curriculum, and the expansion of arts programming within Denver. Mayor Peña also led efforts to begin a public art program that persists to this day, funded by a small sales tax, originating from recommendations from the Cultural Plan.\textsuperscript{156}

Exhibiting the dual significance of physical and image-based reforms, the plan also seeks to promote the city’s identity as one that is connected to the arts. The plan’s “challenge is to create a new sense of self for the City and a world view that affirms Denver through its culture. The arts have a practical role to play in Denver’s emergence as the gateway to the Rocky Mountain region, in supporting trade and tourism and in confirming Denver’s role as the cultural capital of this area.”\textsuperscript{157} Like in Bilbao, the ability to market Denver as an artsy, happening place was crucial to the

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 14.1.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Denver Community Planning and Development Department, “1989 Cultural Plan,” (Denver, CO, 1989), 3.
\end{enumerate}
city’s urban revitalization efforts. The investments in arts and culture recommended by the 1989 Comprehensive Plan and Cultural Denver demonstrates the city’s interest in the civic promotion of art for the enjoyment of its citizens as well as a more calculated effort to use arts and culture as economic generators.

**Developments in Downtown Denver in the 1990s**

The 1990s brought continued attention to Denver’s urban environment, especially to bringing residential development to downtown. The 1989 Comprehensive Plan was still in place, but a new mayor, Wellington Webb (1991-2003), and his appointed Director of Planning, Jennifer Moulton, profoundly affected the trajectory of urban development in Denver. Unlike Peña’s interest in neighborhood revitalization, Mayor Webb and his administration focused their attention on downtown redevelopment. Mayor Webb’s, “reframing of the problem of neighborhood distress as an impediment to downtown development joined neighborhood revitalization to economic development characterized by investments in urban megaprojects. Webb established a pattern that persists to this day, as neighborhood revitalization is a secondary priority to downtown redevelopment.”¹⁵⁸

In contrast to Mayor Peña’s more balanced urban policy, Mayor Webb and Jennifer Moulton aggressively pursued downtown redevelopment, often diverting funding away from neighborhood revitalization efforts.¹⁵⁹

Jennifer Moulton played a significant role in engineering Denver’s turn from neighborhood revitalization to neoliberal downtown development. Moulton was

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¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 165.
trained as an architect and had previously been the director of Historic Denver Inc. She played a leading role in developments in the Civic Center including the Michael Graves’ Addition to the Denver Central Library and the Hamilton Addition. As director of planning, she set Denver’s urban agenda as one that was predicated on economic development. Susan E. Clarke explains that planning under Moulton “is notable for its focus on bringing the middle and upper class back to the city by making the city—particularly the downtown area—attractive to investors and tourists.” ¹⁶⁰ In 1999, she wrote “Ten Steps to a Living Downtown,” detailing Denver’s methods for developing its downtown. While this publication postdates some of the plans and developments detailed in this chapter, it provides a helpful look at Moulton’s approach to re-developing Denver’s downtown.

The “Ten Steps to a Living Downtown” are short guidelines detailing how “city leaders and other interested parties can take proactive steps to attract and increase residential life and 24-hour activity in our central business areas.” ¹⁶¹ Moulton’s vision for downtown included residential development, retail, and cultural facilities so that people could live the majority of their lives in downtown. In order to facilitate this vision, the government promoted residential development through tax breaks or favorable zoning changes. In short, “Denver’s role was to be an ‘efficient economic machine’ able to transform lower-income areas into ‘investor quality downtown residential neighborhoods’ and to attract ‘people with money to spend on housing.’” ¹⁶² Indeed, the housing encouraged by this approach is usually high-end apartments or condominiums aimed at upper-class residents. It follows that by

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.
attracting wealthy residents businesses will invest in downtown areas in order to provide services, attractions, and goods for new residential communities. In short, “Housing is key to revitalizing…neighborhoods, Moulton said, because with more residents, more businesses will thrive.”\textsuperscript{163} In the report, Moulton cites the construction of new mid-rise condominiums in the Golden Triangle as successful development in downtown neighborhoods as a result of municipal investment in the area.\textsuperscript{164}

In order to entice people to move to downtown, the city government is also tasked with making downtown an appealing place in which to live and invest. Moulton explains that, “City government acts at the ‘property manager,’ making repairs and beautifying the common areas in order to maintain downtown’s investment value.”\textsuperscript{165} This can entail a variety of urban policy options, such as the rejuvenation of urban parks, street cleaning, or the installation of public sculpture programs, but the most popular way to use municipal funds to encourage downtown redevelopment is the construction of megaprojects. In particular, megaprojects allow the city to offer appealing amenities for potential new residents while at the same time increasing property values nearby, thereby attracting real estate developers. Moulton notes that, a living downtown must have “new and improved regional amenities” including “flagship cultural amenities.”\textsuperscript{166} She cites the construction of a new theater at the Denver Performing Arts Complex (1991), improvements to the Denver Central Library, and the construction of the Coors Field (1990-1995) as examples of Denver’s successful cultural investments in downtown. The Hamilton Addition can easily be

\textsuperscript{164} Moulton, Ten Steps to a Living Downtown, 13.  
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 13.  
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 13.
understood as a part of Denver’s intentions to use large, municipally funded cultural projects in order to make downtown an attractive place for upper class residents and tourists.

While urban megaprojects and downtown reinvestment were pitched as “public” improvements, their intended public is a privileged one. Low-income and marginalized communities are implicitly excluded from the benefits of neoliberal urban policy, while at the same time they are actively harmed by it. For example, Moulton describes downtown neighborhoods as “an intimidating moat” discouraging access to downtown and the communities that lived there as “those who were unwanted as neighbors anywhere else.”167 By suggesting that minority and low-income neighborhoods near downtown like La Alma/Lincoln Park, Curtis Park and Five Points, are undesirable or detrimental to the city, Moulton’s comments highlight the implicit public associated with neoliberal urban policy. Denver’s downtown development agenda was eroding access to public resources for low-income and minority communities. In the case of the “intimidating moat” Moulton describes, the downtown neighborhoods in Denver were traditionally low-income, Latino and African American havens that experienced gentrification and displacement as a result of aggressive downtown redevelopment.168 Because the Golden Triangle was relatively unpopulated, it is most likely that the Hamilton Addition was not a direct cause of gentrification and displacement, but it was a product of a larger context of city-led downtown development that did.

167 Ibid, 18, 7.
Moulton also stresses the importance of a “clean and safe” downtown, to counteract negative perceptions of downtowns as uninhabitable or unpleasant.169 These statements also implicitly refer to low-income, especially homeless, residents of downtown. The invocation of the phrase “clean and safe” generally accompanies increased policing and exclusion of the homeless in downtown areas that are being redeveloped.170 For example, in Denver, alongside development in downtown, a new police district was created that focuses on downtown and its immediately adjacent neighborhoods.171 Moulton’s articulation of a living downtown full of new baseball fields and art museums is appealing, but downtown revitalization entails negative implications for people already living downtown and the accessibility of public space in the city.

1996 Downtown Agenda

The influence of Moulton’s neoliberal mode of redeveloping downtown Denver is apparent in 1996’s Downtown Agenda. The objective of the Downtown Agenda is for “Downtown Denver [to] be a vibrant and exciting, easily-accessible 24-hour activity center in which workers, residents and visitors enjoy a unique array of choices of employment, housing, arts, entertainment and shopping” through public and private investment.172 The plan notes the growing momentum of development in downtown, linking large municipal projects in downtown to residential and

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169 Moulton, Ten Steps to a Living Downtown, 10.
171 Ibid, 15.
commercial growth. The plan explains that, “The city and private enterprise are repopulating the center city. Extensive construction of new housing and the adaption of existing structures to residential use are attracting residents of all income levels.”

While this quote implicitly denies the connection between downtown development and gentrification by mentioning “residents of all income,” it is clear that Moulton’s policies advantaged upper and middle class residents in accessing housing downtown.

The city’s first experiment with a megaproject in downtown was the construction of Coors Field beginning under Mayor Peña in 1990. Located in a downtown neighborhood populated by abandoned industrial buildings, Lower Downtown (LoDo) saw extensive private investment after the baseball field opened in 1995. One of the lead architects of the project commented in a recent article that,

The results of the investment in the stadium were both immediate and impactful with retail, restaurants and housing in the surrounding area growing rapidly. LoDo has seen an increase of housing units in the area by 408 percent, growth in the occupancy of hotels downtown by 25 percent and a substantial increase in the number of restaurants (totaling over 70), night clubs, breweries and art galleries in the city.

Coors Field’s redevelopment of LoDo into a popular residential neighborhood of historic lofts, breweries, trendy restaurants, and hotels for weekend getaways provided a model for the redevelopment of the Golden Triangle via the Hamilton Addition.

While these projects have different scales and are aimed at very distinct audiences, they both exhibit a neoliberal approach to offer a wide-range of cultural amenities in Denver’s downtown.

173 Ibid.
Neoliberal urban planning and building in Denver from 1989 to 1996 was explicitly aimed at redeveloping downtown Denver into a home for upper to middle class residents. Although megaproject investments, such as Coors Field, are ostensibly public, they are intended for specific audiences in that are upper or middle class. Furthermore, downtown development priorities in Denver have worked against equitable distribution of resources in important contexts such as affordable housing and services for the homeless. Lucas Palmisano describes the growing influence of neoliberalism in Denver’s planning in the 1990s:

The shift towards planning for economic development has been drastic. . . . these changes include rebranding the city as a vibrant 24-hour world-class city, increased use of marketing to target tourism and business, capitalizing on culture and arts, building symbolic developments to attract further investment, and attracting and promoting high-tech creative and service industries and creative-class young professionals that follow.175

The Hamilton Addition was another flagship cultural institution intended to trigger an increase in real estate development in the Golden Triangle after the success of Coors Field in LoDo. This portion of the chapter established the broader, neoliberal context of urban development in Denver that influenced the Hamilton Addition. The next section of this chapter explores the specific plans for the Civic Center and Golden Triangle that influenced its urban form.

**Urban Planning for the Civic Center and Golden Triangle**

The two areas closest to the Hamilton Addition, the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle, were the subjects of planning efforts aimed at redevelopment in the 1990s. Situated directly north of the Denver Art Museum, Civic Center Park is home
to government-uses like the State Capitol and is surrounded by Beaux-Arts planned green space (Figure 2.2). To the south of the DAM is the Golden Triangle neighborhood, an under-populated area with a mix of parking lots, historic buildings, and some arts uses. As a prototypical downtown neighborhood, the Golden Triangle experienced long-term decline during suburbanization and then enjoyed resurgence as a focus for redevelopment with the emergence of neoliberal urban policy in Denver. In the middle of the 20th century, the Golden Triangle was home to Automobile Row and other automobile-uses such as car dealerships and service stations.176 Some of these service uses like mechanic shops remain, but downtown disinvestment in the 1970 and 1980s and the construction of extensive parking lots for the downtown’s nearby central business district left the Golden Triangle largely unused and primed for redevelopment. The Golden Triangle’s depressed land values, which would make land easier to acquire and make profit turnovers higher, made it especially appealing for redevelopment. Throughout the 1990s, some developers had built new luxury condominium facilities in the Golden Triangle, such as the Cadillac Lofts, a re-purposed structure that had previously been a Cadillac dealership.177 In order encourage more real estate developers to invest in the neighborhood, the city concentrated on investing in the cultural facilities in the district, as well as planning to make it an appealing neighborhood for housing development. The mid-1990s saw focused attention to the cultural institutions in the Golden Triangle, including the Denver Art Museum and the Denver Public Library, as well as the public green space

of Civic Center Park. This planning for the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle profoundly influenced the urban form of the Hamilton Addition.

**Venturi Scott Brown & Associates Master Plan**

In 1991, the city of Denver hired Venturi Scott Brown and Associates to create a joint master plan for the Civic Center area encompassing the Colorado Historical Society, the Denver Public Library, and the Denver Art Museum with input from Denver Planning and Development Office. Because of the institutions’ similar civic roles and complementary collections of Western American holdings, the plan recommended the creation of a Civic Center Cultural Complex that would unite the distinct cultural institutions. The Civic Center Cultural Complex was to become a “Center for Western American Culture,” with the three institutions sharing “programmatic goals and physical spaces” because the firm found that the institutions were “physically adjacent but architecturally diverse.” The majority of the plan’s urban recommendations focus on unifying the institutions in order to create a more legible civic and cultural district.

The VSBA Plan attempted to extend the City Beautiful orientation of Civic Center Park southward to encompass the library, art museum, and historical society. In this way, these cultural institutions, and the space around them, would become legible as civic and public space. The plan recommends uniting the three institutions by creating a decorative arc that pushes past 13th Street (Figure 2.3). The plan explains that “the arc...suggest[s] a broad urban sweep...across spaces now perceived

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as barriers” in order to connect the DAM, Library, and especially the Historical Society. 179 The arc, composed of decorative landscaping, breaks the orthogonal city grid, singling out the importance of these particular institutions. Furthermore the arc mirrors the curve at 14th avenue that bounds Civic Center Park, suggesting a connection to the City Beautiful planning of the park. The arc was to be marked by tall poles that would not obstruct views southward towards the Golden Triangle.

Regarding the urban relationship between the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle, the plan recommended making Acoma Street an “Avenue of the Arts” in a nod to the Denver Art Museum, so as to encourage pedestrian movement from the Civic Center into the Golden Triangle.

The plan also considered the Civic Center Cultural Complex’s relationship to budding development in the Golden Triangle, proclaiming some successes of residential development in the neighborhood. A summary of the plan published in 1995 remarks that, “Within the Golden Triangle, several buildings have been renovated for apartments and the first new residential building has been occupied.” 180

The VSBA plan represents an attempt on the part of Denver to invest and improve civic institutions dedicated to learning and public knowledge. However, in the context of previous planning, especially the 1989 plan’s recommendations for leveraging of arts and culture as economic generators, it is likely that improvements to the Civic Center Cultural Complex were aimed at the redevelopment of the Golden Triangle.

179 Ibid, 3.
180 Ibid.
Improvements to Cultural Institutions in the Golden Triangle

Concurrently to the Venturi Scott Brown plans for the Civic Center, the city of Denver financed improvements to the Denver Public Library and the Denver Art Museum. In 1990, a municipal bond issue funded an expansion to the Denver Public Library and refurbishments to the Denver Art Museum. As director of planning at the time, Moulton led the initiative to renovate the library, retaining the original Burnham Hoyt structure, constructing an addition instead at a considerably higher cost. The addition was designed by Michael Graves and opened in 1995 (Figure 2.4). At the time, Graves was at the height of his career, his postmodern addition to the Civic Center brought fresh and significant architecture to the area. The selection of a famous architect marks the beginning of the trend of signature civic architecture that was continued with the selection of Daniel Libeskind for the DAM’s extension.

Graves’ exaggerated classical forms also connect to the neoclassical buildings in Civic Center Park. While Graves’ revival of an architectural language that would be legible to common audiences was short-lived and eclipsed by the likes of Gehry and Libeskind, it found an appropriate home in Denver. Although it facilitates continuity with Civic Center Park, the Graves’ addition’s south-facing façade shifted the city’s urban focus to the south.

In keeping with Moulton’s approach to downtown development through investment in cultural and flagship facilities, discussions about the library addition linked it with growing residential development in the Golden Triangle. A Denver Post article from the year after its opening recounts that the City Librarian was given an award "for the tremendous public accomplishment to build an internationally renowned and culturally significant new landmark, preserving an historic building
while serving as a catalyst for development in the budding Golden Triangle neighborhood." The award was given by Downtown Denver Partnership Inc, the entity that manages downtown Denver’s Business Improvement District (which does not encompass the Golden Triangle).\(^{181}\) Graves’ addition at the Denver Public Library suggests the continuation of Denver’s use of cultural institutions for economic development from the 1989 plan as well the Downtown Agenda’s interest in residential development in downtown neighborhoods. The dual importance of the library as a civic cultural institution that is open to the public as well as one that is used to develop a nearby neighborhood, in this case the Golden Triangle, is one that also informs the Hamilton Addition.

The bond issue passed in 1990 also funded a $9 million renovation to the library’s next-door neighbor, the Denver Art Museum. The funds were intended to “improve the building’s physical condition and install new galleries.”\(^{182}\) The museum also privately fundraised $5.4 million for other improvements including reorienting the museum’s main entrance to Acoma and 13th (instead of 14th Street), establishing an underground connection with the library, and renovating museum space for galleries, a bookstore and a restaurant.\(^{183}\) Many of these developments were aimed at integrating the Civic Center Cultural Complex originating from recommendations by the VSBA plan. In part to emphasize connection between institutions in the Civic Center Complex and in part to connect the Civic Center Park to the Golden Triangle, the DAM and the library reoriented their emphasis to the south along


\(^{182}\) Steven Rosen, “If I Ran the Art Museum” *Denver Post*, December 14, 1995

\(^{183}\) Ibid.
Acoma Street. The DAM opened a new entrance along Acoma Plaza to increase foot traffic there. It is unclear from what planning initiative Acoma Plaza for the Arts, as a shared public space between the DAM and the library, emerged, but by 1996 it was formally open and decorated with public sculpture. The sculpture, “Lao Tzu” by Mark di Suvero, marked Acoma Plaza as a shared public space for arts and culture uses (Figure 2.5). Public space between the DAM and the library at Acoma Street would continue with planning for the Hamilton Addition.

### The Golden Triangle Plan of 1998

The Golden Triangle Plan of 1998 is a crystallization of previous planning and building efforts in the area. It retains many recommendations from the VSBA Plan. Within the context of Denver’s downtown redevelopment paradigm, the 1998 Golden Triangle plan exhibits a neoliberal approach to urban planning, encouraging the construction of mixed-use development and the capitalization on the neighborhood’s association with arts and culture. Following the rubric of downtown residential development influenced by New Urbanism, the plan envisioned the Golden Triangle as an “urban village,” with medium to high-density mixed-use development. An ideal building in this context might have a coffee shop or art gallery on the ground level with apartments or condominiums on upper floors. Noting the symbolic potential of the neighborhood, the plan also suggests leveraging the arts uses and the presence DAM and Denver Public Library in order to cultivate a legible

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identity or “unique character” for the Golden Triangle. By encouraging mixed-use development and the arts character of the neighborhood, the Golden Triangle would become an “urban village: a mixed-use neighborhood with diverse users and uses, a walkable community with lively public spaces, an identifiable neighborhood with a strong sense of place, a unique neighborhood in which to live, work and play.”

The plan recommended changed zoning in the Golden Triangle in order to encourage mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development in the neighborhood. After the plan was published, a zoning designation was created specifically for the Golden Triangle, changing from B8 to B8G. The zoning prohibited new land uses that were seen as not complementary to a residential neighborhood, such as automobile uses, adult uses, package liquor stores, drive through uses, and surface parking lots. In addition to discouraging certain uses, the Golden Triangle’s zoning provided benefits for constructing favorable residential projects. Zoning in the Golden Triangle allowed for higher density developments with arts uses on the first floor or if the project preserves or re-uses a historic structure. By allowing higher density developments with arts uses or historic preservation, developers that followed these suggestions would maximize the number of units they could build and rent, thereby increasing their income. In particular, Acoma Street was emphasized as a location to encourage arts-centered mixed-use residential development, continuing the VSBA plan’s recommendations of Acoma as an Avenue of the Arts. Denver utilized zoning to

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186 Ibid, 3.
188 Ibid, 75.
influence the type of development that was constructed in the area to transform the Golden Triangle into an artsy “urban village.”

In addition to encouraging residential development, zoning in the Golden Triangle aimed to decrease the number of parking lots in the area in order to facilitate pedestrianism instead of automobile use. However, the plan anticipates the problem of an increased need for parking as development in the neighborhood increased, noting, “As parking lots are developed into projects, the stock of needed parking will be depleted but surface parking as a use does not reinforce or contribute to the character of a vital walkable urban neighborhood.”

Parking is fundamental problem of downtown development, it is necessary for visitors to downtown who do not reside there, but pedestrian movement throughout downtown is often more convenient because of a lack of parking. For example, Civic Center Park and the associated cultural institutions to the south, including the DAM, are easily approached on foot, but not easily approached by car. In order to allow automobile use in downtown, but continue the desired density of the neighborhood, the plan recommends the construction of, “a parking structure, as part of a mixed use project, to accommodate parking currently on surface lots,” directly to the south of the Civic Center. The problem of downtown parking would persist in planning for the Hamilton Addition, because its site was a parking lot used by civic institutions nearby. The influence of the Golden Triangle Plan is apparent in the construction of the Museum Residences as a mixed-use development wrapping a public parking garage.

189 Ibid, 23.
190 Ibid, 88.
Continuing the growing emphasis on Acoma Street, the plan recommends Acoma as the primary pedestrian connector between Civic Center Park and Cultural Complex and the Golden Triangle. The plan notes that, “The junction of Acoma, the Avenue of the Arts, and 13th Avenue is an important civic place: it signals the entry into Acoma Plaza which is the threshold of the Civic Center. The green Arc of civic open space, located on the south side of 13th Avenue connects the institutions to the Golden Triangle.”\(^{191}\) In keeping with the VSBA Plan approach to Acoma Street as an “Avenue of the Arts” and the creation of Acoma Plaza, the 1998 Golden Triangle Plan treats Acoma Street as part of a network of public spaces throughout the Golden Triangle and Civic Center. Indeed, Acoma and 13th Street, directly south of the DAM and the library, is noted as a “gateway” or entrance to the Golden Triangle in the Nodes and Gateways diagram (Figure 2.6). Furthermore, the 1998 Plan designates the street as a green spine for the neighborhood. The areas shaded green in the Conceptual Land Use Plan shows Acoma Street as a “public open space” linked to Civic Center Park and Acoma Plaza (Figure 2.7). Although Acoma Street would remain open to vehicular traffic, improved sidewalks, landscaping, and public sculpture would transform the edges of the street into a pleasant pedestrian pathway through the Golden Triangle. In large part, Acoma Street and Plaza as a network of public spaces between the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle was retained in the urban configuration of the Hamilton Addition, suggesting continuity between Denver’s urban planning and Libeskind’s designs.

Through urban planning efforts and investments in downtown, Denver sought

\(^{191}\) Ibid, 68.
to redevelop its downtown into a lively, inhabitable urban area. The neoliberal vision for Denver’s downtown drove the city to invest in megaprojects, like Coors Field and Michael Graves’ addition to the Denver Central Library in order to spur private investment and residential development, which would be continued by the Hamilton Addition. Furthermore, specific planning recommendations from planning developments in the Civic Center and Golden Triangle, especially those concerning public space at Acoma Street, are apparent in the Hamilton Addition. Although the image of Bilbao looms large in discussions of the Hamilton Addition, municipal urban planning had an easily apparent effect on the Hamilton Addition and the public space around it.
Chapter 3
Nexus:
The Hamilton Addition in Context

As examined in the previous chapter, the growing influence of neoliberalism in Denver makes the city’s decision to build an art museum with the program and style of the Hamilton Addition an unsurprising one. Denver’s desire for downtown revival shaped the program of the DAM’s addition as a Bilbao-type museum, but Denver’s plans for the Civic Center and Golden Triangle influenced the urban configuration of the Hamilton Addition and the public space surrounding it. An in-depth look at Daniel Libeskind’s plans for the addition as well as its relationship to its urban landscape reveals a project that was carefully designed to respond to previous urban planning efforts, civic architecture, and traditions of open public space in its surrounding area. Despite its exploding and tumultuous forms, its urban configuration is almost a direct expression of Denver’s planning efforts in the decade prior.

This chapter of the thesis considers the Hamilton Addition in the context of Denver’s neoliberal municipal urban planning efforts from 1989 to 1998. First, I examine the history of Libeskind’s approaches to urban space in order to provide context for the Hamilton Addition. Then, turning to the museum itself, I analyze the early plans for the museum as well as its built form with respect to urban landscape and public space, suggesting the profound influence Denver’s urban planning on the Hamilton Addition.
Libeskind’s Urbanism

In order to understand the Hamilton Addition’s relationship to urban space in Denver, it is helpful to examine Libeskind’s approach to urban and public space throughout his career. Libeskind’s work is generally considered for its style, rather than his approaches to urbanism, even though some of his major works are large planning projects, such as the master plan for the World Trade Center site. Like many star architects, the beginning of Libeskind’s career was characterized by academic study of deconstructivist architecture and theoretical publications. His first building, and arguably his most famous, is the Jewish Museum in Berlin (1988-1999), which chronicles the history of Jewish residents in modern Berlin from the 1300s until the present, including the Holocaust. The almost universal positive responses to the Jewish Museum launched Libeskind’s career as a practicing architect, rather than an intellectual one.

Throughout the 1990s, he designed a number of commemorative museum projects such as the Felix Nussbaum House in Osnabruck (1995-1998), the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester (1999-2002), and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (1996-1999), which was never built. Libeskind’s selection for the Denver Art Museum in 1999 was his first project in the United States. A few years later, he won the commission to design the master plan for the World Trade Center site. Throughout the 2000s, Libeskind designed many more projects than in previous years, perhaps due to his formation of a studio and his increasing international fame. Most of Libeskind’s newer designs are commercial, rather than commemorative in nature, such as residential complexes, office buildings, and cultural facilities. For the purposes of this thesis, Libeskind’s work can appropriately be grouped in two
categories: buildings or urban plans at sites with a memorial or commemorative function and cultural facilities (such as the Hamilton Addition). In my research, I found that Libeskind’s rhetoric concerning his own projects, especially public urban space at his buildings, shifted during the years of the Denver Art Museum and World Trade Center master plan from highly theoretical and intellectual to a much more populist rhetoric. Because this thesis is about the Denver Art Museum, not Libeskind generally, I will use these two types of sites to establish an understanding of Libeskind’s approaches to urban space in order to locate the Hamilton Addition in the context of Libeskind’s oeuvre.

Both Libeskind’s formal style and urbanism can be considered as deconstructivist. Emerging from postmodern critical theory, deconstructivist architecture is defined as “challenging…values of harmony, unity, stability, and proposing instead a different view of structure: the view that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure.” Extending this definition to space instead of structure, deconstructivism views flaws or tension as intrinsic to space. Therefore, deconstructivist architecture attempts to expose and exploit tension between forms, structures, and systems within space. Canonized by a MoMA exhibition in 1988, the original group of deconstructivists included Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman, Coop Himmelblau, Rem Koolhaas and Libeskind. Though their work differed, these architects all attempted to embody contradiction and tension in architecture and urban space. Although they are complexly

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intertwined, Libeskind’s deconstructivism can be described in two parts: a formal language of slashes, angles, and voids and a symbolic language that seeks to express historical contradictions.

Although there are several significant works of deconstructivist urbanism, most notably Parc de la Villete (1984-87) designed by Bernard Tschumi, it does not have a consistent definition. This thesis considers deconstructivist urbanism as an approach to urban space that attempts to express contradictions instead of unifying or standardizing space. Conventional planning on the other hand, attempts to render urban space consistent by following grids, patterns or structures. For Libeskind in particular, deconstructivism entails the use of voids, slashes, and angles rather than orthogonal or organic forms as a means to ‘deconstruct’ the harmony, unity, or stability of a site. Jose Luis Gonzalez Cobelo explains that Libeskind’s “strategies always consist of amplifying existing fractures or cracks, using them as lines of development in which to site his prismatic framework, hewn and split by means of cuts and fissures.”

For deconstructivist architects, and Libeskind in particular, conventional planning, by imposing a structure on space, masks inherent ideological and historical contradictions in a site. Libeskind’s vein of deconstructivism, with regards to urban space, seeks to render past and present visible at once, making the contradictions of history visible. Rather than evoking an idealized past or future through planning, Libeskind often employs forms and structures that resist each other, such as a Communist housing project next to a commercial shopping center. His “approach is

an alternative to the traditional idea of planning, which implies continuity based on projection, rather than an approach that treats the city as an evolving, poetic and unpredictable event.” For Libeskind, the city is constantly re-making itself through social, spatial and architectural practices, which planning should attempt to accommodate rather than suppress.

This approach is especially evident at Libeskind’s commemorative sites, in which he emphatically retains visible symbols of the past located within deconstructed or angular forms. A short examination of Libeskind’s early commemorative and symbolic works, including the Jewish Museum, proposals for Potsdamer Platz and Alexander Platz, and the World Trade Center Master Plan provide a helpful trajectory of Libeskind’s approaches to public space at sites associated with trauma and tumultuous collective memory. At the Jewish Museum Berlin, Libeskind responded to the museum’s mission to exhibit the history of Jews in Berlin with a largely symbolic vocabulary (Figure 3.1). While the Jewish Museum received almost universally positive responses from critics, they focused on Libeskind’s style and the symbolic designations of space at the museum. However, Libeskind’s placement and arrangement of the museum in its urban context was also expertly handled. Bernhard Schneider explains that Libeskind’s “museum addition is related to its immediate and further surroundings—especially to the existing Baroque mansion—in such a distinctive and constructive manner that the urban and architectural features of the project are inseparable. The actual presence of the building in its urban context is

much richer in content than all the metaphorical and interpretational analyses."

Libeskind’s new angular metal-clad structure seemed to reject its urban context, but his designs for the Jewish Museum considered its relationship to the Baroque Kollegianhaus next door as well as accommodating views from taller conventional residential buildings nearby.

Libeskind used a matrix as a method for organizing the spatial layout of the museum. He plotted historical locations in Berlin associated with cultural figures such as Mies van der Rohe, Paul Celan, and Erich Mendelsohn that “formed a particular urban and cultural constellation.” He explains that he “found this connection and plotted an irrational matrix in the form of a system of intertwining triangles that would yield some reference to the emblem of a compressed and distorted star.” Libeskind’s seemingly arbitrary connection between significant or symbolic locations suggests a deconstructivist approach to the urban configuration of the museum (Figure 3.2). Although the locations are laden with meaning, his connection of them via shards resists chronology and finality. Although critics have largely ignored Libeskind’s urbanism at the Jewish Museum, its urban orientation considers connections to the existing landscape of Berlin and the impossibility of imposing order on such a tumultuous site.

Similarly, Libeskind’s competition designs for Potsdamer Platz and Alexander Platz were conceived using a deconstructivist approach to architecture and urban

197 Ibid.
space.\textsuperscript{198} Both sites are in Berlin. Potsdamer Platz was almost totally destroyed during World War II and was bisected by the Berlin Wall until its removal in 1989. Likewise, the East German government controlled Alexander Platz. After reunification, both sites held immense symbolic potential for the newly unified Berlin, as well as commercial potential as large, central open sites for new development. Libeskind’s designs for both sites focused on making the Communist past of Berlin visible, rather than fabricating an idealized past or future for the sites. According to Libeskind, “the identity of Berlin cannot be re-founded on the ruins of history or on the illusory ‘reconstructions’ of an arbitrarily selected past.”\textsuperscript{199} Even though Libeskind argues that Berlin ought not recreate itself in the image of its past, his plans for both sites retained historical structures. For example at Alexanderplatz, Libeskind recommended retaining Communist housing projects, so as to not displace residents, which would serve as a reminder of the past. Libeskind’s urban spaces at these sites embrace historical contradictions, as he placed a high-density commercial development next to the Communist housing project, mediated by a large, public park.

At Potsdamer Platz (1991) Libeskind used a matrix to organize distinct land uses into intersecting shards (Figure 3.3). Much like his process at the Jewish Museum, Libeskind randomly charted lines to signify certain uses (i.e., housing or production), and connected them at the location of Potsdamer Platz. Libeskind’s matrix approach to Potsdamer Platz and other projects can be described as deconstructivist because it exposes the arbitrariness of imposing order on urban space. Libeskind’s discussions

\textsuperscript{198} Although they were not selected, Libeskind’s designs for these two sites are his first two major urban planning projects before the Denver Art Museum, and are therefore helpful for understanding Libeskind’s more intellectual and theoretical early urbanism.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid, 26.
and representations of both of these projects are highly intellectual and are aimed at an educated audience, relying on the audience’s knowledge of arts, culture, and architecture in order to be understood. Even though these projects were not selected and thus were not built, they provide a helpful look at Libeskind’s deconstructivist approach to urban planning.

Libeskind’s master plan for the World Trade Center site was also influenced by deconstructivism. However, unlike his proposals for Potsdamer Platz and Alexander Platz, Libeskind’s rhetoric surrounding this site was populist in nature, intended to gain the support of the public for the project. Developments at the World Trade Center site suggest the messy process of rebuilding after trauma, especially in a high-density urban area where private developers, government entities, citizens, and victims’ families carry differing opinions about the future of the site. Because Libeskind’s master plan was changed significantly over time due to events outside of his control, I will provide a short description of Libeskind’s built plans for the World Trade Center site, as well as his populist rhetoric describing the plans.

Libeskind organized the pedestrian pathways on the site by a matrix, describing the pathways of approach that emergency first responders had used. The defining piece of Libeskind’s plan was to retain the footprints of the original buildings, much like his previous attempts to make the past visible at public sites in Berlin. Although Libeskind came up against considerable opposition from the developer of the site, Larry Silverstein, Libeskind was a staunch advocate for leaving a considerable amount of open public space at the site. He explains that public space is fundamental to cities, that, “The pleasure we take in space—both private and public—is not theoretical; it is fundamental, to how our cities are organized and built, and,
ultimately, to how we live our lives, in our communities, in the future… Downtown cries out for light, and this grand space, this piazza…will be rare and special, a gateway, a place for celebration, art exhibits, markets, public gatherings.”

While Libeskind’s original plans were subject to much revision, the project could loosely be described as deconstructivist in both its attempt to visually express the history of the site and its angular visual language.

Winning the competition to design at the World Trade Center launched the cult of Libeskind, but the architect willfully changed his rhetoric and manipulated publicity in order to get support for his project. Michael Shamiyeh, in the book, *What People Want: Populism in Architecture and Design*, noted Libeskind’s shift from theoretical modes of communication to populist ones in describing his master plan for the World Trade Center, especially in television and radio interviews. A glance at published materials by Libeskind demonstrates this shift. His early texts including *Radix Matrix* (1991) and *The Space of Encounter* (2001) are difficult to read, and were intended for other architects and academics. On the other hand, *Breaking Ground* published in 2005, is a memoir in which Libeskind discusses his projects including the World Trade Center site as part of a personal narrative. In the memoir, Libeskind describes his experiences as an immigrant journeying from Poland to the United States. Perhaps released in order to buoy public support for Libeskind’s vision of the World Trade Center site, a considerable portion of the memoir is dedicated to his experiences being selected and essentially demoted from master planner of the site, sparing no details.

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He depicts the World Trade Center project as the ultimate culmination of his career as an architect and personal life.

In this publication, and other comments about his Ground Zero master plan, Libeskind used emotionally laden rhetoric that Shamiyeh describes as, “formal populism creating a monument that communicates uncondescendingly with a universal audience, and an eloquent rhetorical populism creating simple and emotionally charged metaphors the average man can grasp.” As a commemorative and highly symbolic site, of course Libeskind would be expected to use emotive language, but in comparison to his discussions of the Jewish Museum, a similarly charged site, his language describing the World Trade Center project is much less theoretical and intellectual. Despite the messy and controversial dispute between Libeskind, Larry Silverstein, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, this project thrust Libeskind into the American and international spotlight out of relatively small academic and intellectual circles. Libeskind’s planning for the World Trade Center site occurred after he designed the Denver Art Museum, however; the Hamilton Addition also played an important role in Libeskind’s shift to a more populist architecture, as it was his first commissioned work in the United States and had little commemorative or symbolic content.

Libeskind’s early career is characterized by very few projects that were commemorative in nature, which are often thought of as “high” architecture for their intellectual and academic bent. Towards the beginning of the 2000s, Libeskind and his firm, Studio Libeskind, began to take on more projects, designing commercial and

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cultural facilities, such as office buildings, residential developments and art museums. While his early projects were marked by theoretical language, laden with literary and philosophical allusions, post-2000 projects were easily explicable to large audiences. In other words, Libeskind’s newer work can easily be explained and sold to the next potential client. This is a common trajectory for famous architects, including many of the original deconstructivists like Libeskind and Gehry. After a long period of academic development, their projects begin to attract attention, and then the increased in commissions elicits a more formulaic approach to subsequent projects. In terms of urban space, Libeskind offers a relatively static vocabulary, in which he expounds the importance of his new building as a force of urban revitalization and their creation of public space. While Libeskind’s deployment of urban and public space earlier in his career relied on the symbolic potential of fragmenting, juxtaposing, and sometimes arbitrarily connecting locations, later projects tended to use the same visual vocabulary (of slashes, angles and fragments) without symbolic or ideological purposes.

Libeskind’s populist rhetoric emphasizes the uniqueness of his projects even though they follow a similar rubric. When discussing more recent designs, Libeskind emphasizes his desire to design a building closely linked to its urban context. Like the Denver Art Museum, many of his later projects are parts of urban revitalization schemes, such as the Imperial War Museum in Manchester (1999-2002) and the Bord Gais Energy Theater & Grand Canal Commercial Development in Dublin (2010). Suggestive of his repetitive rhetoric, Libeskind locates the importance of the Imperial War Museum’s construction in larger urban investments such as “the recreation of
the entire Trafford region—urban regeneration, job creation, tourist spending.”

In particular, Libeskind emphasizes the creation of livable and walkable “neighborhoods” with a 24-hour quality of living near his projects. For example, of the World Trade Center master plan, he writes that he didn’t want to “build just another isolated building here, but to create a new neighborhood, a new harmonious community.”

Libeskind’s comments are undergirded by the logic of neoliberal development: the construction a Libeskind building in an underdeveloped area will transform the district into a bustling neighborhood almost overnight. Furthermore, his use of the word “neighborhood” suggests a connection to principles of New Urbanism, which have influenced the preference for mid- to high-density neoliberal residential development. Libeskind’s projects and rhetoric are easily transplanted from vastly different urban contexts, even though he still assures the clients and the public of the uniqueness of their building’s relationship to a particular, local urban context.

Libeskind has a consistent vocabulary extolling the benefits of civic, public space at his commercial and cultural projects. Libeskind frequently refers to public spaces at his projects as “piazzas.” For building projects as disparate as the World Trade Center master plan, the Bord Gais Energy Theater, the Museum of Contemporary Art Vilnius (planned to be opened in 2019), and the Hamilton Addition, Libeskind describes the projects’ exterior public space as ‘piazzas.’ For example, of his theater project in Dublin, Libeskind explains that, “The piazza acts as a grand outdoor lobby for the Theatre, itself becoming a stage for civic gathering with

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the dramatic Theatre elevation as a backdrop offering platforms for viewing.” In these descriptions, Libeskind stresses public space as a gathering place for citizens to engage in community activities. However, Libeskind’s repetitive rhetoric reveals the implicit influence of neoliberalism that leverages public space for economic development.

Libeskind’s easily reproducible rhetoric regarding urban issues at these projects suggests his career’s shift from theoretical deconstructivism at a small number of symbolically loaded sites, to a more formulaic and predictable approach to commercial and cultural projects that uses a neutralized version of his earlier symbolic visual language. The Hamilton Addition marks an important turning point in the trajectory of Libeskind’s career, as his employment of a deconstructivist visual language in Denver was largely without symbolic meaning. This chapter’s following analysis of Libeskind’s employment of urban, public space at the Denver Art Museum provides an in depth look at this post-theoretical work by Libeskind.

**Early History of the Hamilton Addition**

The conventional messaging surrounding the decision to build an addition to the Denver Art Museum focuses on the fact that only six percent of its collection could be displayed in the Ponti Building. However, it is also likely that the city’s focus on regenerating the Golden Triangle also played a role in the decision to build an addition at the DAM. This thesis sees the Hamilton Addition as one portion of the longer process of planning and building in the Civic Center and Golden Triangle

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beginning in 1989, rather than an isolated decision only made based on constraints for the display of the DAM’s collection. Denver’s calculated investments in planning and building at the Civic Center throughout the 1990s paved the way for a more architecturally ambitious megaproject in the Golden Triangle after the Hamilton Addition. Denver was fortuitous enough to find a model in Bilbao when Lewis Sharp attended the Guggenheim Bilbao’s opening in 1997. Even though Lewis Sharp’s knowledge of urban planning at Bilbao was most likely partial, Bilbao provided a model for the use of a sculptural museum by a famous architect tool for urban regeneration that complemented Denver’s pre-existing paradigm of downtown redevelopment. This section of the chapter examines the early history of the Hamilton Addition considering the influence of Bilbao as well as Denver’s neoliberal urban planning.

Compared to other mid-sized cities, Denver’s government is exceptionally willing to fund arts and culture. Even though the city stopped directly funding the DAM in the 1970s, the museum shares a close financial relationship with the city. Much of the DAM’s funding comes from the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District Tax (SCFD), which is a .01% sales tax used to fund public learning institutions in Denver, including arts and cultural organizations. Stemming from the 1989 Plan, the SCFD represents Denver’s commitment to funding public resources such as the zoo, history museum and the DAM for the betterment and attractiveness of the city. Likewise, a municipal bond issue funded the Hamilton Addition. In 1999, Lewis Sharp requested a bond issue of $62.5 million for a new addition to the DAM from the mayor of Denver, Wellington Webb. In November 1999, voters approved the
bond issue with 61% in favor and 39% voting against.\textsuperscript{205} Prior to the passage of the bond issue, the museum trustees committed to raising $50 million as an endowment for the maintenance of the building.\textsuperscript{206} The SCFD and the successful approval of the bond issue suggest a city government, as well as a public, that is willing to invest in cultural and educational facilities.

Because of the financial linkage between the museum and the city, the city of Denver played an active role in planning for the museum addition. Representatives from both the museum and the city, such as cultural leaders, citizens, and city employees, sat on the selection committee. Although the selection committee was comprised of a relatively diverse set of individuals, it is apparent that a downtown development agenda and the model of the Guggenheim Bilbao motivated Libeskind’s selection. In early spring of 2000, an RFQ was released, with eighteen firms responding. Five of these firms were invited to Denver, including Venturi Scott Brown & Associates. Because of his work on the Civic Center Plan, Venturi “had the most knowledge of the site and Denver,” but was eliminated because he was “not as dynamic” as the other architects.\textsuperscript{207} The final three competitors were Thom Mayne, Daniel Libeskind, and Arata Isozaki. The choice to abandon Venturi for a more energetic architect, despite his intimate knowledge of the site, suggests the overriding desire for an avant-garde, spectacular architecture. Indeed, of the top three candidates, Jennifer Moulton commented that, “Arata Isozaki could not have given us

\textsuperscript{205} “Denver Election Results,” Circuli Associates, last modified November 2, 1999.
\textsuperscript{207} \textit{Defying Gravity}, directed by Jocelyn Childs and Amie Knox (2006; Denver CO: Colorado Film Foundation, 2006), DVD.
the kind of building we wanted, a twenty-first century building.” The selection committee members were almost evenly split between Mayne and Libeskind. Committee members disliked that Mayne broke the rules of the competition by bringing model-makers to the final workshop, but spoke positively of his ability to connect to Denver’s Western American identity. On the other hand, Libeskind’s success stemmed from his radiant energy, ability to market himself, and his simplification of his lofty, intellectual ideas for the wide audience of the selection committee. Libeskind’s selection reveals the desire for an international architect that would bring a deconstructivist, international style of avant-garde architecture to downtown Denver.

**Early Site Plans: Nexus**

While Libeskind’s recognizable and unconventional style played a significant role in his selection, his proposal focused on the role of the museum in shaping urban space, instead of the interior or exhibition space of the museum. Libeskind derived the title of the proposal, “Nexus,” from the imagery of Michelangelo’s *Creation*, citing the impending connection between God and Adam’s outstretched fingers as inspiration for the urban configuration of the museum addition. As a nexus, the museum would facilitate connection between distinct urban sites, the Golden Triangle and the Civic Center (Figure 3.4). However, Libeskind’s choice of the *Creation* imagery suggests that the new component of the Civic Center’s urban landscape would not merely be a bridge, or a direct connection, between two sites. Instead, the building’s presence and energy would activate or animate its surroundings, encouraging people to traverse

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208 Ibid
between the two areas. The addition was to become the space between Adam and God’s fingers, signifying an impending connection, but one that had not yet occurred. In this way, the urban configuration of the museum facilitates connection through a spatial void. The addition’s urban program was to create and facilitate an “urban art experience” via this tumultuous experience of urban space moving south along a spatial axis from the Civic Center, to the addition itself, to the Golden Triangle. Libeskind explains that, “The fundamental urban issue is to position the new extension of the Denver Art Museum as a key generator of urban life in the heart of Denver. Nexus creates a public and pedestrian marker signifying that art, architecture and the urban experience are choreographed as a single whole without losing individual identity.” While Libeskind was selected for his style, his proposal was exceptionally sensitive to urban context in Denver.

The site plan’s orientation suggests the importance of pedestrian, green, public space as a continuation of Civic Center Park. The image labeled “Site Plan” shows a computer rendering of the Libeskind addition placed on western half of the site, leaving the entire eastern portion of the site as open, public space (Figure 3.4). Libeskind emphasized the importance of public space in giving the public access to art, installations and public events at the museum proper and in its surrounding spaces. Even though the entirety of the site marked in green was controlled by the city, and thus usable for the addition, Libeskind placed the building between Acoma and Bannock Streets leaving a considerable portion of the site as public, green space. Furthermore, the original design for the museum building dictated that it would be

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raised, so the majority of space on the ground floor or footprint of the building would also be public space (Figure 3.5). Although it was not mandated in the competition, Libeskind recommended the closure of Acoma Street, “allowing the public an unimpeded connection between the civic center, public library and Golden Triangle neighborhood.” While previous planning had not recommended the closure of Acoma, it seems Libeskind’s designs were responding to the planning explored in the previous chapter that used the street as a connector between the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle. Instead of placing the addition in the center of the site, he retained the emphasis on Acoma Street as a throughway to the Golden Triangle as a pedestrian only space. Libeskind’s closure of Acoma Street suggests a preference for the pedestrian over automobiles for approaches to the site. Libeskind’s early designs planned to accommodate automobiles in a belowground parking garage, suggesting the symbolic importance of the pedestrian in the open spaces of the Civic Center and the museum (Figure 3.6). Libeskind’s designs for the urban configuration emphasize the importance of pedestrian, public space, in order to connect the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle.

Much like his early deconstructivist planning explored earlier in this chapter, Libeskind used a matrix-like configuration for the urban organization of the museum. In the Site Plan, the forms of the museum itself are organized by intersecting lines, labeled “Urban Art Experience,” “Library and Parking Extension” and “Storage/Parking” (Figure 3.7). These intersecting lines would form a “chasm of urban space” at the museum. The two smaller lines, constrained within the

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210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
addition’s immediate site, seem to only convey uses, while the longer line that is visually accented, conveys that urban program of the museum addition itself. This line represents what Libeskind termed the Urban Art Experience, connecting the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle, with the addition in between. While this loosely follows the southward orientation of Acoma Street, Libeskind’s designation of the urban art experience on an angle unsettles the orthogonal grid near the addition and the Beaux-Arts planning of the Civic Center. Libeskind’s use of matrices and angular forms as urban organizational methods is characteristic of his earlier urban projects. However, his earlier use of matrices to organize projects was highly symbolic, such as at the Jewish Museum and the plans for Alexander Platz and Potsdamer Platz. Libeskind’s employment of a visual language of intersecting lines at oblique angles in Denver seems to be arbitrary. While the “urban art experience” does perhaps symbolize the civic support of the arts, and the connection between cultural facilities and the city government, the theoretical thrust of Libeskind’s deconstructivist approach to urban space was lost in Denver.

The Built Museum: The Hamilton Addition and Urban Landscape

This thesis argues that the Hamilton Addition was designed to respond to its immediate urban context between the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle, despite its unsettled, angular forms. While Libeskind’s urban proposals for the museum largely remained the same, such as the addition’s siting and the creation of public space at Acoma Street, the form of the museum itself and the plans for a parking structure went through revisions. Examining this process over time reveals suggests that city and museum officials were attempting to make an iconic building that would
signal Denver’s ascendency as a thriving interesting city in which to live, following Denver’s economic development throughout the 1990s. The Hamilton Addition, with Libeskind’s easily recognizable forms functioned as an image or symbol of Denver’s rise as a fashionable, artsy city in the 21st century.

While encountering Libeskind’s style seems unlikely in a mid-sized American city, the architect was adamant that the Hamilton Addition designed with the local spirit and geography of Denver in mind. In press about the museum addition, Libeskind enjoyed recounting his story of flying into Denver and being inspired by the Rocky Mountains, “the energetic, tectonic plates,” which gave rise to the angular forms of the museum. ²¹² As all of Libeskind’s architecture is angular and jagged, the Rockies might not have been the direct inspiration for the building, and instead were a convenient narrative to discuss his proposal. Libeskind’s material choices also attempted to connect to a sense of local identity. Like the Guggenheim Bilbao, the building is clad in titanium, produced nearby in Colorado, remind of the state’s legacy as a center for gold and mineral mining. Libeskind also emphasized the interactions between the building and the atmospheric qualities of Denver, as its titanium cladding changes color with the especially bright Colorado sunlight as the day progresses.

Libeskind’s public discussions of his designs emphasized the symbolic and formal connections between the addition and the unique geography, climate, and identity of Denver, which he extolled. When discussing the project, he praised Denver’s entrepreneurial driven spirit and seemed to be passionate about building this

particular project in this particular city. He commented in an interview that when the addition opened that, “Before I even had a vision I fell in love with Denver. I would not have done this project the way I did, had I not fallen in love. Not just with the beauty of the Rockies here and the beautiful city, but the people and the desire of a dynamic city to move forward.”

Libeskind’s comments about the project convey his surprising passion for working in Denver, and his ability to connect with local residents by complimenting Denver and emphasizing its uniqueness. Libeskind’s laudatory comments focused on Denver’s identity can also be connected to neoliberal urban policy’s attempts to leverage unique local identities to attract tourism and capital investment. With respect to this chapter’s earlier examination of the development of Libeskind’s populist rhetoric, it is unsurprising that he would make such favorable comments about Denver and the symbolic meaning of its new “21st century art museum.”

The Hamilton Addition’s most immediate urban context is the Ponti Building and Michael Graves’ addition to the Denver Central Library, directly to its north on 13th Street. Libeskind intended the style of the Hamilton Addition to complement these adjacent buildings of as institutions of the Civic Center Complex. The Hamilton Addition is physically connected to the Ponti Building by a footbridge over 13th street, and the prow of the building dramatically points northwards towards the original building and Civic Center Park. In addition to the physical connection between the two buildings, they share stylistic similarities. Libeskind commented that he “wanted

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213 Ibid.
214 David Harvey, Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution (New York: Verso, 2012), 91.
to have a conversation with Ponti.” Ponti’s building, often compared to a castle, attempted to frame Denver’s landscape, from the interior through small windows and from the exterior through cutout shapes on the building’s roofline. On the other hand, the Libeskind building’s angular forms become part of the landscape of the Rockies toward the west. The Hamilton Addition’s titanium-cladding also complements the effects of the sun on the glass tile cladding on the Ponti Building, creating visual continuity between the two at different times of the day. The relationship between the Hamilton Addition and Graves’ library is more incongruous due to the library’s playful postmodern style. However, Libeskind argues that he wanted to “enhance other buildings” nearby, suggesting that the triangular forms of the Hamilton Addition echo the triangles that top the pyramids in the Graves Building.

In addition to the Hamilton’s immediate context, Libeskind designed the addition with an eye to its relationship to the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle. As mentioned in this chapter’s earlier discussions of site plans, “Nexus” was intended to establish a physical, pedestrian connection between the Civic Center and Golden Triangle (Figure 3.6). Libeskind conceptualized this pathway as the “Urban Art Experience,” which would include public access to civic art, architecture, and programming, providing a space for public gathering and appreciation of arts and culture in Denver. Libeskind’s designs for the Hamilton Addition as a “Nexus” easily connect to Denver’s previous initiatives to redevelop the Golden Triangle through

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216 Ibid.
concentrated to cultural and civic institutions in the Civic Center. Additionally, the urban configuration of the Hamilton Addition follows closely Denver’s urban plans for the area, especially the use of Acoma Street as a pedestrian connector between the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle.

While the urban art experience physically connects the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle, Libeskind’s designs for the public space around the addition are stylistically distinct from the Beaux-Arts planning of the Civic Center. The Hamilton Addition breaks the City Beautiful orientation of civic buildings aligned in a campus setting due to its angular forms. Although Libeskind’s addition does not continue the beaux-arts planning of Civic Center Park, the pedestrianization of Acoma Street represents a continuation recommendations from earlier plans. Libeskind’s designs for public space in between the Hamilton Addition and the Museum Residences as an extension of Acoma Plaza for the Arts is reminiscent of the Golden Triangle Plan’s recommendation to “Provide linked open spaces on Acoma Street, from Civic Center south to 9th Avenue to create a green spine in the center of the neighborhood.”217 In addition to Libeskind’s designation of usable, pedestrian space, Libeskind’s plans create a visual axis between the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle via Acoma Street, connecting to the 1998 plan’s recommendation to, “Maintain an unobstructed visual axis down Acoma from 8th Avenue to Civic Center Park and from Civic Center Park to 8th Avenue.”218 The narrowing of space between the Hamilton Addition and Museum Residences acts as a gateway to the Golden Triangle, announcing the

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pedestrian’s entrance to the neighborhood. Ironically, while Libeskind offset Acoma Street as an angled pedestrian pathway, in effect, it remains a Beaux-Arts type axis.

Libeskind chose to retain much of Denver’s previous planning recommendations for the Hamilton Addition’s site, except for the Venturi’s arc at 13th Street. The Hamilton addition both breaks and reinforces the street grid. Sited within a one-by-two block section of the site, the building’s angular forms, especially the prow, protrude from these constraints (Figure 3.8). While the museum fits within the grid, the Museum Residences are rotated and set at an angle. Libeskind explains that he, “Rotated the whole block in order to open an oblique series of angles that frame the space, the Plaza of the Arts, it’s a very dramatic space.”

Because of this, Acoma Plaza of the Arts is triangle shaped, funneling pedestrians to the south. Libeskind’s preference for angular arrangements of space, in contrast with Venturi’s more conventional arc, is not surprising considering his deconstructivist style. Libeskind’s urban designs for the Hamilton Addition and its surrounding space largely retained previous urban planning designs, but Libeskind’s use of an angular language is the most significant departure from previous planning efforts, introducing a new style and energy to the area.

Libeskind’s management of the automobile at the Hamilton Addition aids pedestrian movement. The site where the Hamilton Addition was to be located provided parking for Civic Center institutions, which therefore magnified the need for more parking for extra attendees at the museum. Libeskind’s original proposal

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featured a below ground parking garage, but this proved to be too costly. Instead, the city and Libeskind decided to build an above ground parking garage, accessible from 12th Street and Broadway, that would be wrapped by retail and residential development, which became the Museum Residences. These decisions align with the Golden Triangle Plan’s attempts to decrease the amount of surface parking lots in the neighborhood. As noted in the previous chapter, as development increased in the Golden Triangle, the more necessary parking would be, but surface lots were unsightly and did not contribute to a dense, urban village. The 1998 plan noted this challenge and made a suggestion to “Build a parking structure, as part of a mixed use project, to accommodate parking currently on surface lots.” It is likely that this recommendation influenced the decision to build a parking garage wrapped with mixed-use development for the Hamilton Addition, which could function as a model for other developments in the area. This decision effectively solved the problem of parking for the Civic Center, because it hid the parking garage and allowed more space for commercial development. This move along with the pedestrianization of Acoma Street symbolizes importance of pedestrians, while effectively hiding the automobile from sight.

The Museum Residences were a product of Denver’s attempt to encourage residential development downtown and in the Golden Triangle. Built on public land and designed by Libeskind’s firm, the Residences were a public-private venture. The city financed the parking garage while Mile High Development and Corporex Corporation financed the condominiums and ground floor commercial development.

220 Ibid.
Libeskind connects the condominiums with Denver’s downtown revitalization, commenting, “The Museum Residences like the Denver Art Museum itself, aspire to make a cultural nexus in the city.” The Museum Residence’s mixed-use designation, with retail on the first floor and residences above, follows the Golden Triangle Plan’s recommendations for the creation of an “urban village.” The Museum Residences attempted to bring foot traffic to the Hamilton Addition’s immediate area. Libeskind emphasized the vibrancy that people living near the addition would bring, commenting that, “You don’t just want to have a garage next to the museum, you want to have people living here. You want to create a plaza of the arts that’s connected to the civic center park, connected to the state capitol, the downtown, the Golden Triangle neighborhood.” In addition to people residing on the site, the Museum Residences could spur future development in the Golden Triangle. By constructing a model of ideal development, the museum and its attached residences would encourage other developers to buy land and build in the Golden Triangle.

The Museum Residences and Public Space

While the Hamilton Addition and its surrounding space are public, the Museum Residences, excluding the commercial establishments on the first floor, are a private development that is inaccessible to the public and economically inaccessible to the vast majority of residents of Denver. The condominiums are designated as “luxury

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housing,” with cost ranges from $342,000 to $1.25 million.\textsuperscript{224} Upon their opening, the condominiums cost $500 a square foot and were at or near the record for the most expensive residential properties sold in Denver.\textsuperscript{225} The developers leveraged the presence of Libeskind’s name and architecture, as well as the nearby display of art, as reasons for buyers to purchase condominiums. Sited strategically for the best views of the Rockies and Libeskind’s architecture, residents could purchase a piece of the view and bragging rights for living next to one of the newest and most significant pieces of architecture in Denver.

The developers of the condominiums chose not to obey Denver’s city ordinance that 10\% of units in a building of 30 units or more have to be affordable, opting to pay a fine instead of designating any of the units as affordable. The developers argued that, “This kind of design would be financially impossible.”\textsuperscript{226} The impossibility of including citizens of Denver that earned less than $56,311 a year suggests that the neoliberal vision of downtown inaccessible for everyone but the ultra rich. The ART Hotel, a luxury hotel decorated with contemporary art, constructed on the opposite side of the Museum Residences, at Broadway and 12\textsuperscript{th} Street, represents a similar treatment of art and architecture as a lure for tourism. The Hamilton Addition’s site thus embodies a tension between the museum as a civically funded, public space and the Museum Residences as a public-private development intended for extremely wealthy residents. If the Museum Residences were indeed the model for residential development in the Golden Triangle, the neighborhood would quickly become virtually inaccessible to almost all income ranges other than the ultra-

rich. As Sharon Zukin appropriately notes, neoliberal urban policy encourages “mixed-uses, but not a mixed population.” While Libeskind articulated that the “urban art experience” was for the entirety of the public, it seems some of the experience is only for those who can pay.

Public Space at the Denver Art Museum

A relatively large portion of the Hamilton Addition’s site is occupied by public space. Libeskind explains that the museum and its external space is, “for the public, it’s not just to enter the museum and see the art, but to extend the experience of art and to look at the city itself.” The public spaces at the Hamilton Addition are broken up into four separate areas. Depicted in a published site plan, the Golden Triangle Garden is to the south of the addition, the Cultural Center Garden is on the northeast corner of the site, and the Tent Garden is on the northwest portion of the site (Figure 3.9). While some of Libeskind’s recommendations for the gardens, such as the Tent Garden, were not built, the overall layout of the site remains the same as it is depicted. Currently, the Tent Garden is the location of the Clyfford Still Museum, with some landscaping and green space towards 13th Street. Most likely named for their locations, the Cultural Center Garden and Golden Triangle Garden still remain and are landscaped green space, with public sculptures and some seating. Perhaps the most utilized and obvious public space at the addition is the Acoma Plaza of the Arts,

which acts as a continuation of the plaza area between the Denver Public Library and the Ponti Building. The Acoma Plaza is paved in stone creating continuity between the northern section of the plaza, the street, and the area near the Hamilton Addition (Figure 3.10). The stone cladding is elevated slightly above ground level, and the pathway it forms is set at an angle, rather than following the right angle of Acoma Street, creating a narrow, angled space in between the two buildings. Acoma Plaza has built-in stone benches, as well as tables and chairs near the entrance of the museum. It is frequently used for programming as well as temporary installations of sculpture and public art. Trees, marked on the site plan, border the entirety of the site and Libeskind’s slashes are built as pathways or surface decoration.

**Public Sculpture at the Hamilton Addition**

The Hamilton Addition’s sculptural program is symbolic of the new museum and its role in urban revitalization in downtown Denver. Derived from the 1989 Cultural Plan, Denver has a lively city-supported public sculpture initiative, with unique and challenging pieces installed at locations throughout the city, especially at significant civic sites, such as the airport and Colorado Convention Center. While the pieces at the DAM are owned by the museum, not the city, the placement of public sculpture in civic spaces was originally initiated by the city and continued at the museum. The DAM’s outdoor sculptural program began with *Lao Tzu* by Mark di Suvero installed at Acoma Plaza in 1996, and continued during and after the construction of the Hamilton Addition. Other pieces at the Hamilton Addition include *Denver Monoliths* by Beverly Pepper opposite the library and *Pilgrimage* by Zhang Huan at Acoma Plaza. *For Jennifer*, a memorial for the late Jennifer Moulton,
by Joel Shapiro in front of the Clyfford Still Museum represents her hand in shaping the site and setting Denver’s agenda of downtown revitalization.

Two of the pieces, *Scottish Angus Cow and Calf* by Dan Ostermiller and the *Big Sweep* by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, symbolize Denver’s changing identity as a twenty-first century city. *Scottish Angus Cow and Calf* is a large-scale bronze sculpture of a cow and calf, sited in the Golden Triangle garden (Figure 3.11). The traditional cattle sculpture juxtaposed against Libeskind’s titanium forms behind it, evokes Denver’s past as a “cow-town,” associated historically with cattle ranching as well as the city’s contemporary identity associated with arts, culture and tourism. *The Big Sweep*, by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, was commissioned in 1999, and completed in 2006 with the opening of the museum (Figure 3.12). This enlarged broom and dustpan sits at the entrance of the Hamilton Addition. Like Jeff Koons’ *Puppy* at the Guggenheim Bilbao, *The Big Sweep* acts as a recognizable icon for the Denver Art Museum. However, it also signals the city’s successful endeavor in remaking the downtown into a “clean and safe” attraction for tourists and wealthy residents. Cementing this connection between the sculpture and urban policy, an editorial written by an advocate for the homeless in the *Denver Post* worried that police would “sweep” the plaza regularly to remove the homeless from spaces near the museum. The looming image of the *Big Sweep* at the Hamilton Addition renders Jennifer Moulton’s tamed, upscale downtown not just a vision but a reality.

The Hamilton Addition and its surrounding urban space represent the tension between public and private within the context of neoliberalism. The museum addition was both privately and civicly funded, through democratic means in the form of a municipal bond issue. Although it is not cheap, it is not prohibitively expensive
(Colorado residents get a discount and admission is free for children) and can reasonably be considered a public space. Libeskind’s designs for the public space outside the museum accommodate the museum’s patrons as well as pedestrians who have no intent of visiting the museum. On the other hand, the Museum Residences were designed with the ultra-wealthy in mind, suggesting that portions of public space can be bought, sold and inhabited by the wealthy. Furthermore, the developer’s decision to disobey Denver’s affordable housing inclusion ordinance suggests an unwillingness to create residential spaces in downtown that are inclusionary and accessible to all people. While the Hamilton Addition, and its network of public spaces, suggests Denver’s support of public institutions, the neoliberal approach to this project, and Denver’s urban environment generally, advantages the privileged, rather than the public as a whole. The Hamilton Addition is one portion of Denver’s larger neoliberal program of downtown redevelopment through the use of arts and culture and flagship building projects. However, it seems that the neoliberal vision for the 21st century city is a city for the few, rather than the many.
Chapter 4
The Decline of the Museum?
The Creative Class and Urban Policy in Denver 2006-Present

This chapter examines the physical and political landscapes of Denver after
the opening of the Hamilton Addition in October 2006. As my previous chapters
argue, the Hamilton Addition was an integral part of Denver’s attempts to transform
its downtown, and in particular the Golden Triangle, into habited, “urban villages”
tended for upper income residents. This chapter is intended to investigate whether
the Hamilton Addition had some influence on residential development in the Golden
Triangle in the ten years since it has been open. The 2008 Recession had a marked
effect on development in Denver, but the city rebounded faster than most of the
United States. By 2011, downtown development had reached and surpassed pre-
Recession levels. Development skyrocketed in the downtown generally, especially in
LoDo and other neighborhoods in the northwest portions of downtown. Some
development occurred in the Golden Triangle, but not to the same extent as other
downtown neighborhoods. While this is an intriguing question to explore, because my
analysis was limited to qualitative methods, I was not able to make a strong
determination about the extent to which the Hamilton Addition affected building in
the Golden Triangle. However, following Denver’s planning and building in the Civic
Center and Golden Triangle pointed to more interesting research regarding the city’s
use of arts and culture in urban policy. I noticed a shift in Denver’s rhetoric and
planning away from monumental building like the Hamilton Addition towards the
cultivation of smaller arts institutions or “street culture.” This shift is inextricable from
the rise of Richard Florida’s theory of the Creative Class, which was invoked in
Denver, as it has been in many US and international cities. This suggests an evolution of the neoliberal mentality away from the use of the art museum as the marker of arts and culture in a city to the creation of “creative districts” that might be home to coffee shops, art galleries, small scale theaters, tech startups, etc. In light of this, the fourth chapter of this thesis examines Denver’s planning and building in the Civic Center and the Golden Triangle from 2006 to the present, with respect to issues of public space, the shift in Denver’s conceptualization of “arts and culture” and with that, the decreasing authority of the Denver Art Museum as the icon of culture in Denver.

A Changing Denver 2006-Present

In light of the Hamilton Addition’s intended effect of spurring residential development in Golden Triangle, as an element of Denver’s larger interest in downtown revitalization generally, this chapter provides a short overview of development in Denver from 2006 to present. Denver’s downtown successfully redeveloped throughout the 2000s, despite the mitigating effects of the Recession, with the construction of mixed-use residential developments and office spaces. While the Recession slowed building in Denver, the city’s economy rebounded quickly, due to “investments in public transportation, aggressive economic development” and attempts to diversify the region’s economic base away from oil and natural gas.\(^{229}\) Some privately funded building continued during the Recession predicated on hopes that Denver’s economy would recover quickly, and by the second half of 2011,

building had resurged to pre-Recession levels.\textsuperscript{230} According to the Downtown Denver Partnership, $4.8 billion was invested in private projects in downtown Denver, with the completion of 5,565 residential units between 2010 and 2015.\textsuperscript{231} Thirteen percent of development in the downtown as a whole between 2010 and 2015 was in the Golden Triangle, out of ten other neighborhoods. News coverage regarding development in the Golden Triangle tended to be from before the Hamilton Addition opened, asserting that development was going to occur because of its construction. However, news about development in the Golden Triangle fell off after 2006 instead of spiking. Despite this incomplete picture, by 2016, rent in the Golden Triangle was the highest in Denver, with its median one bedroom price at $2150 a month compared to $2100 a month in LoDo. Denver’s once ambitious urban policy of attracting businesses, real estate developers, and residents to its downtown was working.

At the same time that the downtown was changing physically, Denver as a city was experiencing substantial demographic changes. Denver proper, excluding its suburbs, was evolving into a whiter, younger, and more highly educated city center. After the 2010 census, Denver County’s population of white residents increased, while the suburbs’ population of African American and Latino residents increased.\textsuperscript{232} Denver also experienced considerable population growth, especially of young, well-educated individuals. During the Recession, Denver experienced the highest in-


migration of people aged 25-34 in the United States. As of 2013, residents in downtown Denver were 76.2% white, had a median age of 33.9, and had an average income of $76,263 per household. 58.5% of downtown inhabitants were college educated. The demographic makeup of downtown Denver and Denver County was thus shifting toward a whiter, more educated, and higher-income population abetted by neoliberal urban policies.

**Conflicting Plans for the Civic Center**

As Denver’s shifting demographics suggests, the city’s neoliberal urban policy was working to increase real estate prices and attract wealthy residents and tourists to downtown. Because of this success, Denver continued a neoliberal approach to urban policy throughout the 2000s. Therefore this section of the chapter examines developments in the Civic Center that were a continuation of the city’s neoliberal approach to civic architecture and public spaces in the areas immediately adjacent to the Hamilton Addition. The city’s interest in rehabilitating the Civic Center, deriving from the VSBA (1991) and Golden Triangle Plans (1998), and the impending opening of the Hamilton Addition led to the drafting of the 2005 Civic Center Master Plan. With a grant from the Colorado Historical Fund, the Parks Department among other Denver city entities created a master plan to “activate” and renew the Civic

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235 The Civic Center Master Plan was re-codified in 2009, so the only version posted online is an edited version of the Master Plan from 2009. However, the bulk of the text and maps in this plan are from the 2005 plan.
Center. Noted as the “region’s premier public gathering space,” the Civic Center was in disrepair and relatively under-used except as a location for temporary large-scale festivals. In light of this, the plan was intended to transform “the Civic Center into a clean, safe, and connected place of civic engagement.” The plan sought to reconnect the Civic Center to the quickly re-developing landscape of breweries, galleries, and new offices surrounding it. However, the presence of the homeless in the park posed a significant problem for city officials in getting foot traffic through Civic Center Park. It is not mentioned explicitly in the plan, but the inclusion of the coded “clean and safe” tacitly suggests the problem of homelessness in Civic Center Park to be explored later in this chapter. The nature of Civic Center Park as a public space and location of civic expression was one that was contested and debated throughout the planning developments examined in this chapter.

While the plan sought more daily activity in the park, the plan was preservationist in nature, only recommending efforts to rehabilitate existing structures. It retained and aimed to complement the existing organizational structure of the park, especially the Beaux-Arts axes deriving from City Beautiful designs for the park. The axes were renamed for existing uses along their arrangements. The Spatial Organization Map notes the Civic Axis, extending east and west between the City and County Building and State Capitol, and the Cultural Axis extending north and south through the Denver Public Library and DAM, towards Acoma Street (Figure 4.1). While the plan only recommended name changes for the axes, it represented an attempt at organizing the space in the park based on uses that extended outside of the

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park, such as the Denver Art Museum and Hamilton Addition. An editorial published when the Master Plan was finalized noted that, “Denver's new justice center will be one of the anchors of the civic axis. The new Denver Art Museum wing would be the crown jewel of the cultural axis, along with the central library and other facilities.”

The Cultural Axis was intended to act as a promenade, integrating the Civic Center with Acoma Plaza for the Arts and Libeskind’s recently designed public space at the DAM addition.

In addition to the encouragement of activity along the newly named Civic and Cultural axes, various spaces in the park were designated for gathering, interaction and programming. Along the Cultural Axis, the plan designated the large, paved forecourt as the Central Gathering Space. Furthermore, the plan highlighted “Activity Nodes” as locations to encourage daily activity, generally sited at existing architectural or decorative structures. In the Activity Nodes map, red circles designate locations to encourage activity through programming or repairs, and orange circles designate entrance points to the heart of Civic Center Park (Figure 4.2). The 2005 Master Plan represents the city’s interest in bringing more pedestrian activity to the Civic Center, thereby connecting the park to growing downtown development surrounding the park, including Hamilton Addition. Despite the city’s interest in energizing the park, the plan acted mainly to codify measures for historical preservation of the Civic Center. It only recommended changes in designations for spaces, such as the creation of Civic and Cultural axes and the Central Gathering Space, as well as small repairs to existing structures.

238 Ibid, 6.
While the city’s plans for the Civic Center were lackluster, another view of the Civic Center was emerging. Due to a deficit in the city’s Parks Department Budget, the 2005 Master Plan recommended the creation of a non-profit as a public-private partnership to fundraise and make planning recommendations for the Civic Center. This led to the creation of the Civic Center Conservancy “to assist in Civic Center’s restoration; add compatible features, offer free events and work to reintroduce people to Denver’s downtown jewel.” The Civic Center Conservancy is composed of interested citizens, such as real-estate developers, urban planners, and arts leaders in Denver. This public-private mode of park revitalization is common. Allowing more costly and expansive projects than cities would be able to afford without private funds, non-profits were integral to the success of Battery Park, High Line, and Millennium Park. These non-profits often exhibit a development mentality towards public spaces, and are a hallmark of neoliberal urban development.

In 2004, the Civic Center Conservancy invited Warrie Price, the director of the Battery Park Conservancy, to tour the Civic Center in Denver. In an article in the Denver Post, Price was quoted touting the economic importance of developing the park. She said, “This concept can't be thought of as merely the rejuvenation of a park. It's an economic development project that will create an economic engine. When the dynamics of a public space change, the dynamics of the whole space around it change, as well.” The article also noted the use of Millennium Park as a model for the Civic Center, much like the Guggenheim Bilbao functioned as a model.

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244 Ibid
for the Hamilton Addition. Unlike the 2005 Master Plan, which exhibited a preservationist view of the park, Price’s comments suggest an approach to the park that would leverage it for continued economic development in downtown.

Although the city’s Master Plan was approved and released to the public in 2005, interest in revitalizing the Civic Center continued afterward, especially with the impending opening of the Hamilton Addition scheduled for October of 2006. In the summer of 2006, the Civic Center Conservancy commissioned Daniel Libeskind to design a new master plan for Civic Center Park.²⁴⁵ It also paid for Mayor John Hickenlooper and the head of Denver’s Parks and Recreation Department, Kim Bailey, to visit Millennium Park in Chicago, which had recently opened in 2005. Hoping to gain momentum from the imminent opening of the Hamilton Addition, the non-profit unveiled Libeskind’s plan in late August. In effect the opposite of the city’s preservationist rendering of the Civic Center, Libeskind’s plan featured a large water plaza, crystalline retail and restaurant structures, and a pedestrian footbridge, among other eye-catching amenities in signature Libeskind style. At the unveiling, John Hickenlooper called the plan audacious, “in the best sense of the word. It’s going to push us to be more than what we were.”²⁴⁶ Hickenlooper explained that Libeskind’s plan for the Civic Center was intended to mirror the successful development of LoDo, spurred by the construction of Coors Field.²⁴⁷ The Libeskind Master Plan thus represented the potential of developing the Civic Center in the hopes of aiding downtown development. While the plan was commissioned by a non-profit, Libeskind’s plan represents the height of Denver’s downtown development

frenzy, led by the city, private developers, and interested citizens. This is characteristic of neoliberal urban development, which often advantages and magnifies voices of individual citizens who tend to be real estate developers or business-owners in making urban policy. With Libeskind’s plan for the park, the Civic Center could become the Millennium Park of downtown Denver, rather than continuing as a haven for the homeless, providing a significant contribution to the downtown’s revitalization.

Libeskind’s master plan for the Civic Center followed the trend of spectacular architecture embodied by the Hamilton Addition. Libeskind’s plan for the Civic Center was the opposite of the 2005 Master Plan’s quiet historicist vision of the park (Figure 4.3). However, much like his urban arrangement of the Hamilton Addition, Libeskind chose to retain some of the organizational methods of the city’s 2005 Master Plan, such as the Civic and Cultural axes and Activity Nodes. A large portion of the park’s green space was reimagined as a shallow pool that could be drained for large events. In keeping with his brand of deconstructivist urbanism, that attempts to keep the past visible, Libeskind did not recommend that any of the historic structures in the park be demolished. Instead, he designed crystalline glass pavilions or structures to complement most of them, including a 72-foot monument. New monuments were clustered at the Activity Nodes from the 2005 Master Plan. These new structures would have retail or restaurant uses, suggesting the importance of consumption to this vision of the park, unlike the Master Plan’s vision of the park as a “green oasis and place of refuge and reflection.”

247 Ibid.
In keeping with the Master Plan, Libeskind emphasized the importance of pedestrians to the Civic Center in order to connect the park with the rest of downtown. At the unveiling of the plan, he explained that, “It is important to bring the whole city to the park, not just drive by it in a car.” Libeskind retained the Civic and Cultural axes and promenades, elevating them on platforms, emphasizing connections over or through existing streets. Libeskind also recommended the closing of 14th Avenue in off hours, a continuation of his choice to close Acoma Street for the ease of pedestrians in Denver’s downtown. Libeskind’s plan did not envision new parking facilities, however; it did connect to existing transit options via a pedestrian walkway that terminates at Broadway and Colfax, where Denver’s regional transportation district station was located. The white, twisting walkway quotes Calatrava’s Zubizuri Bridge at Bilbao, examined in Chapter One, suggests Bilbao as a persisting model for Denver’s downtown revitalization efforts, at the Hamilton Addition’s site as well as the Civic Center (Figure 4.4, 4.5). Unlike Denver’s preservationist master plan, Libeskind’s plan for the Civic Center recommended the construction of sensational structures for attracting tourists, in service of aiding economic development.

While citizens of Denver responded positively to Libeskind’s style at the Hamilton Addition, his Civic Center Master Plan was overwhelmingly disliked. His recommendations for the Civic Center were deemed “too radical” and “an obliteration of the historical features,” in press coverage following the revelation of this new master plan. A survey of area residents, conducted by the Parks and

249 George Merritt, “A Soaring Plan for Civic Center.”
Recreation Department, returned a 4-to-1 ratio of residents disapproving of the new plan. The public took issue with Libeskind’s invasive modifications to the park because of the park’s historic nature. This suggests that public tolerance for avant-garde architecture is higher at contemporary art museums due to their association with art, than for civic sites with historical, neoclassical structures. Due to overwhelming disapproval of the Libeskind plan, the Parks and Recreation Department announced that Libeskind’s plan was only an option and it was eventually discarded. While the Libeskind plan was not constructed, it reveals the city’s competing aspirations for its public spaces, and the ease of private interests, such as real estate developers, in affecting planning and building for public spaces. In this case, public backlash prevented the Civic Center Conservancy from following through with Libeskind’s plan, foreshadowing an end to Denver’s use of “starchitects” to build standout buildings or in this case parks.

**Homelessness in Civic Center Park**

In addition to conversations regarding the best future for Denver’s Civic Center, the Hamilton Addition’s opening brought up homelessness as another recurring issue in Denver’s Civic Center. Due to its central location, proximity to public facilities such as the library, and its large grassy, unpaved areas, homeless individuals often gather and sleep in Civic Center Park. City leaders, real estate developers, and citizens are generally critical of the homeless presence in the park, with safety and the presence of drugs cited as problems with homeless individuals in

\[251\] Merritt, “Civic Center redesign draws critics.”

\[252\] Ibid.
the public space of the park. While homeless individuals have been making the park their home since at least 1995, dialogue regarding homeless in the park surfaces at politically pivotal moments. Dialogue about and criticism of the homeless in the park has been amplified by Denver’s decisions to utilize empty municipal buildings near the Civic Center as temporary shelters, in both 1995 and 2006. For example, in 1995, developer Mickey Zeppelin heavily criticized the city’s plan to put a shelter in the Civic Center, saying that the park “was built for a higher purpose.”

Conversations about homelessness focus on two issues: the use of municipal buildings as homeless shelters and the presence of homeless individuals in Civic Center Park. In other words, whether homeless people can occupy buildings in the Civic Center or if they may exist in the public space of the park. These two issues are often conflated in dialogue surrounding homelessness in Denver, embodying the tension between the public intended to use neoliberal public space. In this case, exclusion was explicit.

In 2006, the city of Denver made plans to use a city-owned building on the corner of West 14th Avenue and Bannock Street as an overnight homeless shelter. Citizens and business-owners in the Golden Triangle objected to this decision, citing the opening of the Hamilton Addition as a reason to block the influx of homeless people into the Civic Center. The executive director of the Golden Triangle Museum District remarked that, “Putting a homeless shelter a block away from the extension could expose the city's soft underbelly - its chronic homeless problem - to an international audience.” Some business owners in the Civic Center felt that the

254 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
visibility of homeless individuals in the area at the same time as the opening of the Hamilton risked negative perceptions or negative press for the city of Denver. The same individual went on to say that the Civic Center, “is Denver's front yard, and the city is about to unveil a darling at the same time it busses the homeless into our neighborhood to sleep.”\textsuperscript{257} The analogy of the Civic Center as the city’s front yard is reoccurring from the debates about the presence of a shelter in the Civic Center in 1995, suggesting that these are persistent views held by real estate developers and business leaders about public space in Denver. This analogy is particularly interesting because it compares the public space of the Civic Center to the privately owned space of a front yard. Indeed, while some leaders in the Golden Triangle approved of the city’s decision, for many, the city’s “front yard” was to be a space free of homeless people.

Commentary regarding the homeless also followed the city’s efforts to revitalize Civic Center Park with Libeskind’s master plan. Rhetoric about the homeless in Civic Center Park focused on threats to safety and the relative underuse of the park, which was, in critics’ views, caused by the homeless in the park. At the unveiling of Libeskind’s plan, Mayor John Hickenlooper commented that the construction of Libeskind’s plan would entail an influx of movement and people that would mean that, “The folks who have stumbled in life and are homeless and are really struggling aren’t going to feel comfortable, and they will go somewhere else.”\textsuperscript{258} As Hickenlooper’s comments suggest, for the city, the homeless presented a major obstacle to revitalizing the Civic Center. Most public discussions regarding Civic

\textsuperscript{257} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{258} Merritt, “A Soaring Plan for Civic Center,” \textit{Denver Post}. 
Center Park, with or without the Libeskind plan, involved comments from the public and city officials regarding the presence of homeless individuals in the park. For example at a public forum regarding the Libeskind plan, participants were vocal that the city ought to “crack down on drug dealing and homeless people in the park.” This conflagration of issues led the city to ban charitable organizations from feeding homeless people in Civic Center a few weeks after the opening of the Hamilton Addition. The Parks and Recreation Department was adamant that this was done for safety’s sake, but it is likely that this decision was motivated by critical city dialogue surrounding homelessness.

City officials’ and citizens’ views of the homeless in both the buildings of the Civic Center and its public space suggest a view of the park that would exclude the homeless. Stigma attached to the homeless in redeveloping public spaces is common. As Don Mitchell and Lynn A. Staeheli note, the policies of neoliberal “redevelopment…exacerbates and causes both invisible and visible homelessness as single-room occupancy hotels are destroyed, rents rise, shelters are relocated and services (like public toilets) closed down.” Mitchell and Staeheli find that the relationship between homelessness and redevelopment is a catch-22 because,

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259 Gonzales, “Park design deemed ‘too radical.’”
261 While the city did ban charitable organizations from feeding homeless people in the park, homeless people have continued to make the park their home (even to this day). No further divisive actions were taken on the issue of homeless people in Civic Center Park, but Denver has continued to pass restrictive policies for the users of its public spaces since 2006, such as outlawing “urban camping” in 2015 and closing the space of Acoma Plaza of the Arts from 10pm to 6am, effectively outlawing sleeping in public spaces.
“redevelopment both exacerbates and is hindered by homelessness in downtown.”

Public space, in particular, becomes the arena in which these tensions play out, because public spaces are often used as cornerstones of redevelopment efforts. The shockingly inhumane comments of citizens and city officials regarding homelessness in the Civic Center suggest this tension is present in Denver. For developers and the city, the homeless presented a risk that redevelopment efforts, of the Hamilton Addition and renovations to Civic Center Park, would not be successful. With the homeless present and visible, people would not buy property nearby or want to spend time in the park. Therefore, the public space of the Civic Center remained public in name, but not in effect, as homeless people were encouraged to move elsewhere.

**Municipal Building in the Civic Center 2006-2013**

As the issue of homelessness played out at the Civic Center, the city continued its neoliberal building program in designs for a new Justice Center. This section of the chapter examines Denver’s municipal construction of several new buildings in the Civic Center from 2006 to present, which demonstrates the departure from a monumental building approach in the Civic Center. While the city’s plans to build Libeskind’s ambitious plan for the Civic Center fell through, the city continued to fund and build a substantial number of new buildings in the Civic Center Complex even through the Recession. In the fall of 2006, due to a lack of space and out-of-date facilities, Denver began planning a new Justice Complex, which would include a courthouse, a new detention center, and office space. Coming off the heels of the

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263 Ibid, 145.
264 Ibid, 150.
completion of the daring Hamilton Addition, Denver wanted to continue its ambitious building program in the Civic Center in order to contribute to growing downtown development. The city selected Steven Holl to design a “signature building” for the Justice Center Complex, which would become the Lindsey Flanigan Justice Center. While Holl is not ranked among the likes of globally prominent “starchitects” like Libeskind and Gehry, he was a nationally recognized name in architecture. Furthermore, the city referred to Holl and the Justice Center project with language suggesting the construction of a “stand-out” or “signature” building, much like the Hamilton Addition. When Steven Holl was selected, Mayor Hickenlooper commented that, “We are inspired by the caliber of signature architects who competed for this opportunity, and we are understandably excited about the selected firms.”

Following the model of the Hamilton Addition, the Justice Center was to have a catalytic effect on downtown development. Indeed, the senior partner at Holl’s firm remarked upon their selection that, “We want the courthouse and detention center to be part of an urbanism that will be a catalyst for growth for the whole area.” While the programmatic needs and functions of an art museum and a courthouse differ, the city’s continued emphasis on bringing “signature” architecture to the Civic Center reveals the city’s long-term interest in using civic building projects to beautify and spur development in downtown.

However, in October of 2006, Steven Holl quit due to disagreements over the availability of funding for realizing his designs and was replaced by a Denver-based

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266 Ibid.
Craig Miller, curator of the DAM’s Architecture, Design and Graphics Department commented on the loss of Steven Holl’s presence within the newly reinvigorated (via the Hamilton Addition) Civic Center, saying, “Civic Center is becoming one of the most important architectural complexes in the area. We had two very distinguished national firms chosen to do these municipal buildings, and so losing one of those does upset the equation.”

Steven Holl’s unsightly exit from the Civic Center, the public’s outcry at Libeskind’s plans for the Civic Center, and the forthcoming effects of the Recession, marked the end of Denver’s architecturally ambitious building in the Civic Center. Indeed, subsequent projects, while a significant financial investment, were stylistically restrained, and had more in common with Denver’s 2005 Master Plan’s historicist vision of the Civic Center. The Justice Center Complex was separated into four buildings; all designed by Denver-based firms, built in contemporary variations of neoclassical style. In effect, the buildings of the Justice Center Complex were the opposite of “stand-out” or “signature” buildings.

The complex cost $800 million and was fully completed by 2013. In order to accommodate automobile traffic for the new Justice Center, the city built a mixed-use parking garage, which also contained a post office and retail uses on the first floor. This project was the first to be completed and opened in 2007. Most of the new buildings are located on the western edge of the Civic Center, along the Civic Axis of the park, where Colorado’s History Society had previously been located. The Lindsay

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267 Ibid.
Flanigan Justice Center, designed by gkworks, opened in 2011 (Figure 4.6). The building retained some of Holl’s designs for the façade, and features light stone and an angled glass façade. Across a landscaped public plaza is the Van Cise-Simonet Detention Center by Harman-Cox Architects, opened in 2010 (Figure 4.7). The last portion of the project to be completed, the Ralph L. Carr Justice Center, is located on the opposite end of the Civic Center, at 13th and Broadway. It is granite-clad, and features a glass-domed atrium that symbolizes the transparency of democratic governance (Figure 4.8). In addition to the four-story Justice Center, the project also included a twelve-story high-rise office complex for municipal workers. The city also funded $20 million in refurbishments to Civic Center Park, following the recommendations of the city’s Master Plan from 2005. These refurbishments included restoring the Greek Theater, Voorhies Memorial, Broadway Terrace, park walkways and balustrades. Limited by funds and a fickle public, Denver’s aspirations for the Civic Center were curtailed, leading to the construction of conservative neoclassical buildings for the Justice Center Complex.

**Cultural Institutions in the Civic Center**

While Denver’s building in the Civic Center was stylistically less audacious, the presence of the Hamilton Addition led to a concentration of the city’s arts and cultural institutions nearby. The Hamilton Addition’s opening contributed to the formation of a more coherent and robust Civic Center Cultural Complex. In addition to the DAM, the Denver Public Library, the Byers-Evans House Museum, the area

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also became home to the Clyfford Still Museum and History Colorado, as the renamed Colorado Historical Society, and the Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art after 2006. The expanded Justice Center at 14th Avenue displaced History Colorado, which moved to 14th Street and Broadway, directly east of the Hamilton Addition’s site. History Colorado was designed by Tryba Associates, and opened in 2012 (Figure 4.9). The Clyfford Still Museum joined the Civic Center Cultural Complex after 2006. After noted abstract expressionist painter Clyfford Still died, his wife donated their collection of his works and archives to the city of Denver with the stipulation that they be displayed for the public. The city owns the collection of Still’s works, but a non-profit was formed to fund and operate the museum. The museum board chose to locate the museum in the Civic Center because of its “proximity to the Denver Art Museum and other cultural attractions,” as opposed to the Central Platte Valley and LoDo.272

The Clyfford Still museum also stood to benefit from the decision to move into the complex, citing the prestige and legitimacy of long-standing institutions such as the Denver Art Museum as a reason for the new museum’s location. Project director Dean Sobel explained of the decision that, “This particular four block area, which is called the Civic Center Cultural Complex, is really Denver’s cultural mecca, so the fact that the Clyfford Still Museum can join those existing august institutions establishes us also as a leading cultural amenity.”273 The museum is located alongside the Hamilton Addition at Bannock and 14th Street. Designed by Brad Coepfil of AlliedWorks Architecture, the museum’s poured-in-place concrete is understated

271 “Civic Center Park Project Overview.”
compared to the rest of its neighbors in the Civic Center (Figure 14). In 2015, the Kirkland Museum for Fine and Decorative Art finalized designs for a new building in the Golden Triangle located at Bannock and 12th Avenue.\textsuperscript{274} In addition to Denver’s focus on rehabilitating the “civic” portion of the Civic Center, the presence of the Hamilton Addition facilitated the proliferation of cultural institutions in the Civic Center.

While Denver continued planning and building in the Civic Center and Golden Triangle even through the Recession, it abandoned the monumental building model used for the Hamilton Addition. The civic architecture built after the Hamilton Addition is much more restrained, in part due to problems working with Steven Holl, poor reactions to Libeskind’s plan for the Civic Center, and potentially budget shortfalls during the Recession. Because neoclassical styles tend to accompany judicial buildings, it might have been the nature of the uses of the buildings of the Justice Center Complex that led to their style. However, even the construction of cultural institutions, such as History Colorado and the Clyfford Still Museum, featured a muted style compared to the Hamilton Addition. Even though the city abandoned the “signature” architecture mode, the Hamilton Addition did facilitate the proliferation of municipal arts and culture uses in its immediate vicinity, as evidenced by History Colorado, the Clyfford Still Museum, and the Kirkland Museum’s move to the southern edge of the Civic Center. Denver’s neoliberal approach to the built environment persisted even after the abandonment of its mode of monumental

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{274} Michael Paglia, “When it opens in 2017, the new Kirkland Museum will be Transcendent and Ascendent,” \textit{Westword}, September, 16, 2015.
building. The next section of this chapter examines the new manifestation of the use of art and culture in urban policy, the attempt to attract the Creative Class.

The Golden Triangle Plan of 2014: New Approaches to Urban Policy

As the first plan for the neighborhood since the 1998 Golden Triangle Plan, the 2014 Plan responded a different landscape in downtown Denver than the one of the late 1990s. As the beginning of this chapter explores, downtown Denver had experienced rapid development, but a considerable portion of the Golden Triangle still remained undeveloped. The city’s commitment to downtown development continued, but city leaders including the mayor had changed (Michael Hancock was elected in 2011). The priorities, methods, and goals of development had shifted. In 2000, the city released a new comprehensive plan that emphasized sustainability and decreasing dependence on automobiles as emerging concerns for a rapidly growing city. Reflecting Denver’s new priorities for sustainability, the city had also financed and began construction on a light-rail system, Fastracks, under Hickenlooper’s term as mayor. The 2014 plan was thus responding to a different political and urban context than the plan from sixteen years prior.

Like the 1998 Plan, this later plan was composed by groups of the city government including: Denver Planning Board, Community Planning and Development, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Arts and Venues, Office of Economic Development, Regional Transportation District, and a group of stakeholders from the Golden Triangle, such as residents, employees and civic leaders, as well as a consulting firm. Although downtown, especially LoDo, had been successfully redeveloped in recent years, the Golden Triangle Plan begins by
highlighting the neighborhood’s stunted development. According to the plan, “The Golden Triangle has a mix of urbanity and vitality and setting like no other neighborhood in Denver—and it has yet to achieve its full potential.” Therefore, the 2014 Golden Triangle Plan was still an attempt, like the 1998 Plan, to redevelop the neighborhood by attracting residential and commercial development. While the 2014 Plan continues recommendations for the cultivation of the artistic spirit of the neighborhood, its approach to art and culture is distinct from the 1998 Plan’s. Rather than continuing the use of a large cultural institution, with a signature building as a marker of the presence of culture, the plan attempts to cultivate “street culture” in order to attract the Creative Class, Richard Florida’s demographic group of well-educated workers that perform creative labor in their work, a concept to be discussed below.

The 2014 Golden Triangle Plan offers four major aspirations for the future of the neighborhood to be “Eclectic, Connected, Creative, and Livable.” The plan’s recommendations follow these positive, if vague, descriptors of the future manifestation of the Golden Triangle, two of which are derived from Richard Florida’s writings. The plan suggests the encouragement of an “eclectic” mix of architectural styles and types of building uses. Connecting to the 2000 Comprehensive Plan’s concern for decreasing automobile use, the Golden Triangle will stay “connected” with improved transit and pedestrian connections to the rest of the city. The neighborhood will continue to cultivate “creativity” through support and promotion of arts, culture, and entrepreneurial work. Last, cleanliness and safety are

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used as markers of a “livable” Golden Triangle. The plan is structured around these buzzwords as goals for future growth in the neighborhood, but continued development in the neighborhood is the desired outcome of the plan. Although rents were increasing in the Golden Triangle, much of the land remained undeveloped as surface parking lots. The plan notes that, “Multiple surface parking lots are underutilized and do not actively contribute to a high quality urban pedestrian environment, forming “missing teeth” in the urban fabric.”

In light of this, the plan highlights locations where the price of the land was more than the value of the building or structure on it, as well as particular locations that the city wanted to be developed called Catalytic Development Sites. Both of these are depicted in the Catalytic Development Sites map of the plan (Figure 4.10). The amount of sites highlighted in yellow and their proximity to the city’s recent building projects, including two Catalytic Development Sites immediately south of the Hamilton Addition and Museum Residences, suggests that development in the Golden Triangle was relatively weak. Because the Hamilton Addition had not fulfilled its potential for catalytic effects on the neighborhood, the 2014 plan continued recommendations for modifications and beautification of public spaces to continue attempts to attract developers.

With respect to the city’s priority of decreasing the use of automobiles in Denver, and especially in downtown, the 2014 plan envisioned a Golden Triangle that was a “walkable, bikeable neighborhood with great transit.” Among other recommendations, the plan promoted a “park once” environment, to decrease driving

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276 Ibid, 19.
within the neighborhood, by suggesting that parking lots be located at the edges rather than the center of the district. However, the plan’s most important priority was to make the neighborhood friendlier for pedestrians and bicyclists, rather than cars. The plan recommended extensive refurbishments to sidewalks and pedestrian-based public spaces. In particular, the plan envisioned the use of designated walking pathways, marked by landscaping and signage, which would function as distinct routes and spaces throughout the neighborhood. Continuing emphasis on Acoma Street as a green, promenade-like space, the 2014 plan recommended the creation of the Acoma Neighborhood Greenway, extending from 12th Avenue southward to 9th Avenue. The Proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian Network map shows the Acoma Neighborhood Greenway in green (Figure 4.11). Highlighting the city’s continued attempts to connect the Hamilton Addition and the Golden Triangle, the plan recommends pedestrian intersection improvements such as re-poured sidewalks and pedestrian bulb-outs immediately to the south of the museum. The plan also recommended the creation of an Arts and Culture Trail, a pedestrian route between significant arts and culture destinations inside and outside of the Golden Triangle, marked in purple in the next map (Figure 4.12). The plan notes that Denver has a, “Rich collection of arts and culture facilities, venues and programs…The potential Arts and Culture Trail will link these attractions, bring life and vitality to the streets, and extend outward to surrounding Downtown districts.” Unlike the Acoma Neighborhood Greenway, the Arts and Culture Trail would only be noted with signage and would not feature any new construction.

278 Ibid, 32.
The new pedestrian spaces of the 2014 Golden Triangle Plan were not just intended for walking, but were to be public spaces with many potential uses. Indeed, the Golden Triangle Plan pointed to the connected, multi-faceted public spaces of Civic Center Park and the Denver Art Museum’s Acoma Plaza as a model for the plan’s vision of an integrated network of public spaces. The plan’s Open Space Strategies diagram shows both the new pedestrian pathways, in purple and green, and areas that could potentially become new open, public spaces, in purple highlighting (Figure 4.13). The plan promotes the active use of these public spaces through small, flexible spaces for different uses and programming. For example, Acoma’s Greenway features one long connected outdoor public space that would contain a dog park, festival areas, a children’s learning garden, parklets (a sidewalk extension that provides more space for recreation), a covered rain garden and a café with outdoor seating (Figure 4.14). Traffic calming measures were also recommended for Acoma Street, such as decreasing the number of lanes of traffic or using bulb-outs at locations where pedestrians might gather.

In addition to its recommendations for city-owned public spaces, like the sidewalks and the street, the plan recommended public-private partnerships to spur development of open spaces. The plan encourages the city to work with businesses to encourage “privately owned public spaces.” The plan does not specify what these spaces might look like, or how “public” they might be, but this recommendation certainly points to the growing privatization of public spaces in Denver. The Golden Triangle Plan of 2014 continues the leveraging of public spaces to encourage

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279 Ibid, 40.
investment in residential and commercial development in the neighborhood.

However, it is important to note that the majority of Denver’s recommendations for public spaces from the 1998 plan, such as Acoma Street as a green spine for the neighborhood, were never constructed, suggesting that the city’s urban priorities, when it comes to funding rather than planning, might be located elsewhere.

**Attracting the Creative Class**

This plan’s most significant departure from previous planning in the Golden Triangle is in the type of art and culture that it attempts to cultivate in the neighborhood. The city’s previous approach to using arts and culture in urban policy led to the construction of the Hamilton Addition. Previously the city relied on the use of a large, relatively prestigious institution as a marker of art and culture in the Golden Triangle and the wider city. While Denver’s urban policy after 2006 can still be described as neoliberal, its cultural urban policy shifted away from favoring large building projects for arts and cultural institutions to attempting to cultivate smaller more “authentic” sources of art to be consumed by the city’s residents and cultural tourists. This shift came from the rising popularity of Richard Florida’s Creative Class theory that influenced urban policy, and which was quickly adopted in many American cities, such as Milwaukee, Memphis and Denver.

Florida’s book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, published in 2003, had an almost immediate effect on municipal urban policy in the United States. Florida’s texts explore the growth and economic importance of what he terms the Creative Class, a new demographic group of workers that use creativity in their jobs. Florida defines the Creative Class as, “people in science and engineering, architecture and design,
education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content.”

Florida’s simultaneous inclusion of artists, writers, musicians and computer programmers, scientists, and engineers suggests that the Creative Class has much to do with the earning and spending potential of creative workers. Indeed, the Creative Class tends to be young, mostly white, easily mobile and affluent. For Florida, the presence of the Creative Class is the most important economic factor for the health of the post-industrial city’s economy. Florida’s theory has changed the ways that cities approach economic development and urban revitalization. Rather than attracting employers or large corporations, in Florida’s view, cities ought to attract the Creative Class, which will drive growth and attract employers. The validity of Florida’s economic analysis has been called into question by academics, but his Creative Class theory has persisted as one that has affected urban policy in a surprisingly diverse and sizeable group of cities.

Florida’s recommendations for urban policy lie in his characterization of the wants, needs and desires of the Creative Class. Florida characterizes the group as not just creative workers, but creative people, who are constantly in need of cultural stimulation. In other words, members of the Creative Class use their creativity for their work, but also lead a “creative” lifestyle. In turn, if they have ample creative stimulation, their work will benefit. Members of the Creative Class want challenging and participatory experiences, which Florida terms as “multidimensional experiences.” He explains that Creative workers want, “creative life packed full of

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281 Ibid, 13, 166.
intense, high-quality and multidimensional experiences. And the kinds of experiences they crave reflect and reinforce their identities as creative people.”

Florida’s explanations of the Creative Class’ habits and predilections seem vague, but he devotes a considerable amount of time to explaining the “experiential lifestyle” that the Creative Class is seeking in his writing. Creative Class individuals, “favor active, participatory recreation over passive spectator sports. They like...street-level culture—a teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros, where it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators.” In order to attract the insatiable Creative Class, a city’s urban policy ought to foster “authentic,” creative neighborhoods teeming with opportunities for cultural participation.

Calling upon Jane Jacobs’ view of a densely populated city, Florida recommends the cultivation of “street culture” that is constantly available and offers continual stimulation for creative types. His description of street level culture is the ideal urban experience for the Creative Class:

The culture is ‘street level’ because it tends to cluster along certain streets lined with a multitude of small venues. These may include coffee shops, restaurants and bars, some of which offer performance or exhibits along with the food and drink; art galleries; bookstores and other stores; small to mid-sized theaters for film or live performance or both; and various hybrid spaces—like a bookstore/tearoom/little theater or gallery/studio/live music space—often in storefronts or old buildings converted from other purposes.

Urbanistically, street level culture translates to high-density, mixed-use, pedestrian-based development. The Creative Class might prefer to talk an ambling walk through a bustling arts district instead of watching television or going to a sports game,

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282 Ibid.
283 Ibid.
however; as Florida’s examples above illustrate art exists for the Creative Class to consume, rather than create. Furthermore, the preparation and packaging of street level culture to be consumed by the Creative Class requires a huge sector of service (or “non-creative”) workers, who do not have access to the amenities of the Creative Class. While Florida is adamant that the Creative Class wants “authentic” urban and artistic experiences, his theories have proliferated into the policy playbook of so many cities, including Denver, that the authentic urban experience he touts is already a cliché. Despite Florida’s convictions, the pre-planned “eclectic” street, proliferated by Florida’s writings, is just as banal as the Disneyfied sports stadia, malls and theme parks he criticizes.

The Creative Class and the Museum

While the Creative Class is composed of “creative” types including artists, the relationship between the Creative Class and the art museum is a vexed one. Florida portrays the museum as an institution struggling to remain relevant in the 21st century, citing falling attendance numbers and reliance on big-ticket exhibitions. According to Florida, for the Creative Class, the museum is an obsolete form of entertainment, in contrast with the lively, participatory nature of “street culture.” Florida writes that museum’s attempts to attract younger people are, “wasted on the Creative Class, whose members are more drawn to organic and indigenous street-level culture, which is typically found not in large venues like New York City’s Lincoln Center or in designated cultural districts like the museum district in

284 Ibid.
285 Ibid, 182.
Washington, DC, but in multiuse urban neighborhoods.” Florida points to the institutional nature of the museum as one factor of its obsolescence to the Creative Class, unlike a small-scale arts organization that someone might encounter on the street.

Furthermore, Florida suggests that the content of the museum struggles to stay relevant to its context, or that it is “art imported from another century for audiences imported from the suburbs,” unlike art that is made in the area in which it is seen. Perhaps Florida’s most important reason for the Creative Class’ avoidance of the museum is that it is not participatory and distances the viewer and the artist. He writes, “You may not paint, write or play music, yet if you are at an art-show opening or in a nightspot where you can mingle and talk with artists and aficionados, you might be more creatively stimulated than if you merely walked into a museum, … were handed a program, and proceeded to spectate.” Florida’s depiction of the Creative Class as insatiable for the experience of the carefully curated street is incompatible with the passive observation of art displayed on the white walls of the museum. Regardless of whether Florida’s criticism, on behalf of the Creative Class, of the museum is warranted, his orientation away from signature institutions as markers of culture in a city towards smaller arts organizations based in the “street,” has influenced urban policy everywhere, especially in Denver. However, Florida’s Creative Class theory is adapted inconsistently in many cities and is used to justify the construction of new art museums as often as the creation of street culture. Its emergence in Denver after the construction of the Hamilton Addition followed from

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286 Ibid, 148.
287 Ibid, 183.
the fact that the city already had an iconic art museum, so cultural policy could focus on street culture as one portion of a thriving arts scene.

**The Creative Class in Denver**

Richard Florida’s pervasive influence on contemporary urban policy is apparent on the curated streetscapes of artistic districts everywhere, especially in Denver’s continued push to attract members of the Creative Class. As this thesis has explained, Denver’s use of arts and culture to attract tourists and residents began in 1989, priming the city government for Florida’s new manifestation of a neoliberal approach to arts and culture in urban policy. However, Florida’s ideas shifted the type of art promoted by the city. As previously mentioned, Florida’s Creative Class theory found a home Milwaukee, Memphis, and Baltimore as well as Denver, but it found an ardent follower in microbrewery owner and future mayor of Denver, John Hickenlooper. Well-known in Denver for opening one of the first breweries in LoDo in 1988, Hickenlooper was enchanted by Florida’s ideas when he decided to run for mayor in 2003. He used Florida’s theory as part of his platform during election season, handing *The Rise of the Creative Class* out to his staff, and touting the power of the Creative Class in his campaign speeches. Hickenlooper continued espousing Florida’s ideals once he was elected, leading the city’s new marketing strategy aimed at the Creative Class. Hickenlooper and Florida have such close relationship, that he is quoted in the praise section of Florida’s website saying, “He’s a very smart

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288 Ibid, 183.
demographer, a visionary, a creative. He looks at data in a way that no one else does.”

While Hickenlooper went on to become governor of Colorado in 2011, Florida’s ideas were still prominent in Denver’s city government under the new mayor, Michael Hancock. Florida continued to visit the city for various speaking engagements, keeping close ties to the Downtown Denver Partnership, a private interest group that lobbies for downtown development. Denver’s dedication to Florida’s theories was rewarded when he labeled the city as part of an “urban revolution” that was harnessing the power of the Creative Class after the 2008 Recession.

Then it comes as no surprise that urban planning in Denver would be tailored towards attracting the Creative Class. The assumption and persistence of Florida’s Creative Class theory is apparent in the 2014 Golden Triangle Plan’s attempt to cultivate an “eclectic” and “creative” neighborhood teeming with vibrant, visible, participatory culture. The 2014 plan continued the 1998 plan’s attempts to cultivate an artistic identity for the neighborhood, but the 2014 plan represents a new definition of “art” that is informed by Florida’s theories of the Creative Class. The 2014 plan suggests that the city, “Allow for and promote a range of arts-related land uses, to preserve the distinctive artistic character, and cultivate a new ‘creative class’ of artists to enrich the neighborhood.”

Although the Hamilton Addition was only eight years old, and was once the cornerstone of the city’s attempts to transform the neighborhood into an arts district, it was of surprisingly little import to the 2014

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293 Ibid.
Golden Triangle Plan. For example in the following description of the landscape of arts and culture in the neighborhood, the Hamilton Addition is demoted to the blanket category of “museums.”

The Civic Center is a nationally renowned place of arts and culture. An eclectic mix of museums, galleries, public art and education amenities creates an unparalleled destination. Food trucks and art walk events attract everyone from the suburban family to the urban hipster. Creative enterprise abounds through the Golden Triangle, whether someone is making original art, crafting cuisine, or developing an app at a local incubator space.\(^\text{295}\)

This quote is redolent of the shifted understanding of “art and culture” in Denver’s Creative Class-inspired urban planning. The Golden Triangle Plan still considered museums important artistic resources, but the Hamilton Addition and the other institutions of the Civic Center Cultural Complex were not foregrounded. Once the Hamilton Addition was built, the city shifted its emphasis from the Denver Art Museum as the signifier of arts and culture towards smaller, more participatory art institutions. Furthermore, the theory of the Creative Class influenced policy that tends to focus on attracting residents instead of tourists, while the Hamilton Addition in the tradition of the Guggenheim Bilbao appeals more to tourists.

The 2014 plan emphasizes the active appreciation, participation, and creation of art rather than its passive reception in a museum or theater, highlighted by the last sentence in the quote. Its recommendations focus on art and its visibility, particularly in outdoor settings. Indeed, the plan’s most positive comments regarding the Hamilton Addition is that its programming often “spills out” into Acoma Plaza.\(^\text{296}\) Its recommendations for the promotion of art and culture are all either outdoors (and hence highly visible activities) or educationally based, endorsing the creation of art.

\(^{295}\) Ibid, 69.
The Hamilton Addition was important as a precursor for the cultivation of ‘street culture’ in the Golden Triangle, but at the time of the drafting of this plan, the city’s priorities were on a continued development of culture that would attract members of the Creative Class. These recent aims were distant from Denver’s pre-existing cultural resources like the Denver Art Museum.

The second shift in the city’s understanding of art and culture is the inclusion of “creative enterprise” as a form of art. Influenced by Florida’s understanding of the Creative Class, as the earlier quote highlights, someone developing an app is considered equally an “artist” or creative person to someone actually making art. This expanded view of “art” is borne out in the 2014 Plan’s recommendations that the neighborhood foster not only art uses but that it become a home to the innovation economy and creative industries. In order to promote this sort of artistic economic work, the plan recommends encouraging the following uses: non-traditional office locations, flexible workspaces, shared amenities, places for formal and informal collaboration. Indeed, sounding similar to Florida himself, the plan notes that innovation economy workers, “desire proximity to downtown, cultural amenities, entertainment venues and gathering spaces, as well as a range of alternative transportation options.” The plan’s layering of more traditional art forms and “creative work” become even more complex, as the plan recommends the continued leveraging of arts institutions to attract more creative workers and businesses to the neighborhood. Although Florida and Denver label entrepreneurial work as an artistic enterprise, the Creative Class model is still invoked in the service of economic

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296 Ibid, 74.
297 Ibid, 70.
development, driven by entrepreneurs, regardless of whether they are called artists or not. While the nature of the art and culture that Denver is leveraging has morphed since 1989, Denver’s leveraging of arts and culture to pursue its development agenda remains the same.

**Criticism of the Creative Class**

As previously mentioned, Florida’s Creative Class theory has been scrutinized for the validity of his economic analysis as well as the potential effects of urban policy that caters solely to young, mobile, affluent individuals. Florida’s easy-to-read bible and motivational speeches provide a blueprint for cities experiencing serious economic downturns to transform overnight. Despite Florida’s populist writings and charismatic speeches, the attraction of the Creative Class amounts to re-packaging of the policies and priorities of neoliberal urban development. Jamie Peck argues that, “The script of urban creativity reworks and augments the old methods and arguments of urban entrepreneurialism in politically seductive ways.” The mythos of the rising tide of the Creative Class is peppered with the success stories of Austin, Texas, and Seattle, but it amounts to urban policy predicated on economic development that benefits only the developers, whether they be real-estate developers or tech developers. A comparison of the Golden Triangle plans from 1998 to 2014 reveals that other than a shift away from signature building projects like the Hamilton Addition, the city’s priorities were relatively the same: leverage arts and culture, build “public” spaces, and use branding to attract businesses, real-estate developers, and

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298 Ibid.

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people with money to spend to the neighborhood. At the same time that cities work to attract and satisfy the Creative Class, extant problems of poverty, housing insecurity, and homelessness continue and often increase. For example, after eight years of creative city development in Milwaukee, poverty increased, pushing the city to the seventh poorest in the United States.\textsuperscript{300} Daily, the creative city becomes a reality in cities across the United States, but it is only a myth for those who are not lucky enough to be deemed “creative.”

**Imagine 2020: A More Accessible Cultural Policy in Denver?**

In 2014, the Denver Commission on Cultural Affairs and Denver Arts and Venues released a new six-year Cultural Plan for the city of Denver, Imagine 2020, replacing the now outdated 1989 Cultural Plan. Denver’s shifting understanding of art and culture, stemming from Richard Florida’s Creative Class theory, is apparent in Imagine 2020. This manifests in the plan’s preference for small-scale arts institutions. Indeed, as one of the city’s largest arts institutions, the DAM is conspicuously under-mentioned in Imagine 2020. Similarly to the 2014 Golden Triangle Plan, the DAM functions as one of many cultural institutions in the city, rather than as the singular icon of art in Denver, as it was originally intended. Florida’s influence is also apparent in the plan’s attempts to harness “creativity” in all its forms for its significant contributions to the city’s economic vitality. Imagine 2020’s invocation of the Creative Class model is unsurprising considering the city’s long-


standing use of art and culture as economic drivers. However, unlike previous planning, Imagine 2020 recommended considerable efforts to make art and culture accessible to all citizens of Denver, rather than just elites or members of the Creative Class.

Imagine 2020 was created with extensive community input. First, Denver’s arts and cultural leaders were consulted to examine problems and priorities for the future of art and culture in Denver. Then the city conducted a poll that asked residents their perceptions and experiences of art and culture in Denver. The poll over-sampled African American and Latino residents in order to understand why they were not using arts institutions with the same frequency as white residents. The planners found that African Americans and Latinos felt they faced more substantial obstacles to accessing arts institutions. They also found that minority respondents felt that the art in Denver was not “culturally diverse.” In light of this, one of the plan’s major tenets is that “Arts, culture and creativity are truly inclusive and accessible for all.” The plan attempts to address the systemic barriers that prevent people of color and low-income people from participating in the arts, such as “public transit availability, communication of events, increased commute times, rising ticket prices, parking locations, time, income, and family-friendly material or activities.” The plan’s recommendations for inclusion and accessibility included: a discounted pass for cultural institutions; promoting existing arts institutions in underserved neighborhoods; promoting the use of unconventional and easily accessible locations (such as laundromats, shopping malls, and the DMV) for art and performance;

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302 Ibid, 10.
continuing Scientific & Cultural Facilities District Free Days and marketing them to specific audiences.\textsuperscript{304} In addition to race and class-based inclusion and accessibility issues, the plan also considers art accessibility for children and the elderly. In late 2014, a grant program entitled “PS You Are Here,” originating from accessibility concerns in Imagine 2020 was implemented. The city offered $40,000 in grants for arts organizations in neighborhoods to make projects using creative place-making for neighborhood revitalization. The majority of the grants were given to low-income and minority communities.\textsuperscript{305}

Imagine 2020’s new priority of access and inclusion in the arts, marks a significant shift from Denver’s past approaches to art that prioritized institutionalized art for privileged residents. PS You Are Here and the Hamilton Addition occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of art and culture in urban policy. However, the city only spent $40,000 on the PS You Are Here program as compared to the $62.5 million for the Hamilton Addition, suggesting a disjunction between rhetoric and funding in cultural planning and city planning. Imagine 2020 is still in its earlier years of implementation, and it might be too early to tell whether or not Denver has made good on promises of access and inclusion. However, this cultural plan represents a welcome change in rhetoric from the coded language of past planning that only stands to benefit the privileged. Regardless of whether art becomes more accessible in Denver, the 2014 plans collectively suggest the diminishing power of the museum as a cultural authority in Denver and abroad. The cultivation of “street culture” rather

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid, 43.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid, 44-45.
than the construction of a signature art museum represents the next manifestation of
the use of art and culture in neoliberal urban planning in the 21st century.
Conclusion

This thesis has considered the Hamilton Addition at the Denver Art Museum as a case study of the use of art museums in neoliberal urban revitalization plans. In addition to the museums examined in this thesis, there are copious examples of art museums acting as a force of urban revitalization. Typically grouped with the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Hamilton Addition, Santiago Calatrava’s extension to the Milwaukee Art Museum also played a role in a process of downtown revitalization, which has been explored by scholars.\textsuperscript{306} Although museum buildings continue to be built within the context of neoliberal urbanism, it seems that the trend of building spectacular museum buildings has passed. However, even without the quintessential Gehry, Libeskind or Calatrava building, other newer art museums are still acting as cornerstones of redevelopment efforts. For example, the Whitney’s move to Chelsea at the foot of the High Line cemented the already occurring gentrification in the Meatpacking district in New York City.\textsuperscript{307} Renzo Piano’s designs for the Whitney received positive reviews from critics for its style that was deliberately pared down in comparison to “spectacular architecture.” Yet despite the evolution of stylistic approaches to museum buildings within the context of urban revitalization, conventional rhetoric surrounding museum building poses museums as a make or break force in the revitalization of a district continues.

In Los Angeles, the recently opened Broad Museum designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro is also acting as a catalyst in the formation of an arts district. These

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\item\textsuperscript{306} Jeffrey Zimmerman, “From brew town to cool town: Neoliberalism and the creative city development strategy in Milwaukee,” \textit{Cities} 25 (2008).
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efforts are in service of the redevelopment of downtown Los Angeles as a complement to municipal revitalization efforts.\footnote{Holland Cotter, “Making Museums Moral Again” \textit{New York Times}, March 16, 2016.} Funded in large part by the patronage of philanthropist Eli Broad, “Museum Mile” as has tentatively been named, boasts the Broad Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art (designed by Arata Isozaki in 1986), as well as the Walt Disney Concert Hall designed by Frank Gehry, opened in 2003.\footnote{Lauren Schuker Blum, “Downtown L.A. Goes from Gritty to Glitzy,” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, April 10, 2014.} The placement of these three cultural facilities together is a testament to the generosity of philanthropists in Los Angeles as much as it is municipal planning, but the museum is built on public land and significant civic investments in these projects and other public spaces such as Grand Park are all in service of redeveloping Los Angeles’ downtown. The area has newly enlarged sidewalks to facilitate pedestrian access, a public plaza behind the Broad, a forthcoming metro station, plans for mixed-use residential development, as well as a luxury hotel funded by a mix of both public and private investment. In a considerable gesture towards an open and accessible museum, the Broad is free to the public. However, living conditions have worsened only a few blocks away in Skid Row, the epitome of poverty and homelessness in LA, throwing the tension between the excesses of neoliberal planned cultural facilities and public parks and the underbelly of homelessness and gentrification into high relief.

The continued presence of a neoliberal approach to museum building at the Whitney and the Broad museums suggests that even though stylistic changes in architecture have scaled down the paradigm of museum building dominated by

Gehry, Libeskind, Calatrava, and similar architects, the use of arts and culture as forces of urban development still continues. The narrative that this thesis examines cannot be applied categorically to the designs for all art museums, but its approach proves to be a useful one for situating the architecture of art museums within a larger context of urban and political processes and for questioning the accessibility of art museums as they mature and evolve into the 21st century.

**Questioning the ‘Public’ Art Museum**

As I explored in the introduction of this thesis, museums are widely considered, in both academic thought and cultural practice, to be public institutions that are reasonably considered public space. Underlying the perceptions of art museums as public institution is the belief that they are moral entities that have some ideal relationship to the public. Indeed, a recent *New York Times* article by Holland Cotter entitled “Making Museums Moral Again” chronicles activism at prominent art museums that attempts to expose the immoral behavior of museums such as ties to corporations that deny climate change and inhumane labor practices. Because of their didactic and discourse-shaping roles, the public has historically held and continues to hold museums to a high standard of ethical behavior. Furthermore, art museums often display politically charged artwork and objects, providing a location for the confrontation and discussion of social issues of extreme import. Art museums as “generators of life lessons, shapers of moral thinking, explainers of history,” in Cotter’s words, are not neutral institutions exempt from the political dialogue they facilitate. Cotter’s article focuses on the ways in which museum exhibitions and
programming can be used to confront museums’ complicated pasts, especially concerning acquisitions and the troubled political and social history from which some art objects came. I want to extend Cotter’s thesis to include not just exhibitions and public programming, but the art museum as a public space.

Especially at a time when art museums are more carefully considering how to become more accessible to low-income and minority communities, I want to ask why they have been so eager to participate in an approach to museum building that weakens public access to museum and the city more generally.\(^{311}\) While spectacular architecture draws crowds of people that might not visit museums otherwise, as I have suggested throughout this thesis, the implicit public of the spectacular art museum built within a neoliberal context is a privileged one. Furthermore, although it is less directly demonstrated in this thesis, art museums, new mixed-use residential development, and luxury hotels all work together to price low-income and minority communities out of their homes in downtown and inner city neighborhoods. The contribution of art museums to gentrification is worse than museums being inaccessible, and certainly works against initiatives to establish stronger ties to communities that are historically less likely to visit art museums. People that are pushed out of their neighborhood by downtown redevelopment are unlikely to visit one of the icons of that process afterwards.

Of course, the promise of municipal funding and increased revenues from ticket sales at openings of new museums offers respite for museums that are desperate for funding. But often it seems that investments in flashy buildings for museums that

\(^{310}\) Cotter, “Making Museums Moral Again.”
already have a workable amount of exhibition and storage space, might be an unnecessary use of funds, especially as attendance rates never seem to meet the sky-high expectations touted after the hiring of a star architect.\textsuperscript{312} It seems that there might be better uses for funding than relentless museum expansion. Indeed, the museum and its public deserve to be more than a means for increasing nearby property values. As a young academic, my feeling about these issues might be idealistic, but I believe that as the institutions tasked with protecting and sharing some of our most important art, historical, and cultural objects ought to share that ‘wealth’ with everyone. Like the protestors Holland Cotter cites in his article, I am inclined to think that museums’ behavior ought to be aligned with good of the public they serve both inside and outside of their walls, regardless of what architecture they might have.


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